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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MAROTZ
DROMINA
SAN CELESTINO
MEZZOGIORNO
HURDCOTT
FAUSTULA
LEVIA PONDERA
OUTSIDERS—AND IN A ROMAN TRAGEDY
GRACECHURCH
MONKSBRIDGE

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PRODIGALS AND SONS

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PRODIGALS AND SONS

BY JOHN AYSCOUGH, pseud.

AUTHOR OF "MAROTZ," "HURDCOTT," ETC.

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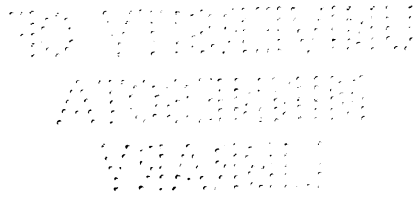

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"WINGS OF A DOVE"

HALFWAY up the hill the motor yielded, apparently, to a sense of fatigue, and was clearly making up its mind either to go no further, or at any rate to rest before proceeding. The driver, without betraying the least impatience, seemed minded to humour it, and backed the machine gently to the flat ground whence the steepish slope started; then, as if he hoped to persuade it that the objectionable hill had been abandoned or levelled, he started forward again hopefully. For that time, at all events, the manœuvre succeeded; the motor unsuspiciously, if not very rapidly, glided up the incline, and reached the top without remonstrance.

The lady inside looked pleased; a stretch of level road followed and the pace was again as good as ever. After half a mile came a dip, obviously to be paid for by another stiffish climb. She now became a little anxious; but, with feminine caprice, for every motor is "she," the machine made no bones about this hill, which was, in fact, steeper than the last. The lady smoothed her brow, and decided that the difficulty at the former hill had been a mere matter of temper, not referable to any proportionate external cause, any more than her own momentary ebullitions and irritations.

No doubt all would now go well. She resumed her somewhat inattentive consideration of the landscape, and allowed her thoughts their usual vagrant latitude. They passed a pollard willow—whose trunk was a mere empty rind—with a monstrous hump, and a weird resemblance to a bad-looking old man carrying a heavy load and staggering under it. The back of the driver's head was almost always presented at an angle, there was something

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sentimental in his habit of tilting it so constantly to one side; and his colourless, rather lean, face had never expressed any sentiment whatever. Do motor drivers think, or how do they cheat nature into permitting the inside of their heads to constitute a vacuum?

Quite close to the unfenced road a shepherd was wading about among a hundred folded sheep. They were newly shorn, and looked gawky and slightly ridiculous. The shepherd was elderly and had a long ragged beard, and a tall battered hat of a neutral colour, and a sort of cloak, that was really a tattered overcoat, flung over one shoulder; he was rather out of repair and picturesque altogether. His dog sat outside the hurdles and made no secret of being bored; he was wishing that the sheep might be moved somewhere, that it might be his duty to dash hither and thither noisily and distribute yelps and little bites among the phlegmatic flock.

Behind the fold was a patch of dark-green kail, beside a perfectly bare patch of extremely dirty brown, where the fold had been yesterday.

Farther back was a twenty-acre square of absolutely yellow charlock, then a deep purple band just ploughed, and then hundreds of acres of vivid green, and over all a hump of down, the highest point of the plain.

On the other side, to her left, were other bands of green, and purple, and mustard-colour, with broad white stretches where the chalk showed: far away on a ridge stood a row of stacks that looked like gables of an upland hamlet.

Another hill to climb—she wished the driver would not draw attention to it by changing the gear. But he did, and the motor, with a relapse into crossness, behaved precisely as before.

Again they were backing for a fresh attack, and again without the least betrayal of impatience on the part of the man, who merely put his head straight, and then tried to see behind the car.

But the lady had no idea of allowing any machine a monopoly of temper, and she leant forward and absolutely forbade him to go any further back.

Here were two more folds of sheep, each with its shepherd, one to the right a few yards in front, one to the left a few yards behind. And one shepherd was

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receiving visitors, for a ploughman and a ploughboy, at the end of a furrow, had stopped to remark that "it were wunnerful hat and yet sa starmy."

"So't be: and puts the ship all of a caddle," agreed the shepherd. "They'm as fassy as if they was loose, and Towser amids on 'em."

"Don't go back," urged the lady. "I'm going to ask those men to push."

The men had not the least objection. Easy-going creatures are never averse to doing anything which isn't their work. The shepherds each left his ninety and nine in the wilderness, and the ploughman and plough-lad said "Whoa" to their teams and came to help. One horse looked round to see what might be going forward; the other three immediately went to sleep.

The motor was a small one, single cylinder, and of an obsolete build: even with its rather disproportionate body it professed to weigh no more than twelve hundredweight. With four men pushing, it moved up the hill nearly as quickly as a donkey-cart: though a donkey-cart, that actually supervened from a bye-lane halfway up, was ill-bred enough to pass it.

"Take it easy, Jane Eliza," said the driver to his beast, probably for the first time in her life. He was a lame cobbler, and doubtless a socialist, and he sat in a sort of shallow tray with his legs straight out before him.

Jane Eliza, unused to sarcasm, took it easy, and the motor slid ahead.

"Git on, cancher," the cobbler hissed, endeavouring to pitch his adjuration in a tone loud enough for her, but not loud enough for the motor-car troupe. But the idle engine made no noise, and he was overheard.

"Shall us two come and push behind your motor?" one shephered inquired graciously over his shoulder. "The car's a pulled hus."

The cobbler had never heard of a facetious shepherd, and scowled darkly, with a jag at his rope rein that Jane Eliza resented by standing stock-still.

"If he gives another I'll lie down," she said to herself: which would have made her master present something the appearance of standing upright in a coffin.

"Eve!" cried the facetious shepherd who had seen

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soldiers engaged in a tug-of-war at a summer camp on the plain. He was unaware of the connexion between strenuous exertion and the mother of mankind, but had respected himself too much to inquire.

The motor reached the top and professed itself, noisily, perfectly willing to proceed without further assistance. The lady distributed largesse, and got back into the car, which made some show of willingness to atone for the past by making up for lost time.

The four helpers stood still to watch the departure and perspire at their leisure. For some weeks afterwards they eyed each car that passed near, if a hill was imminent, with a fresh interest. But none happened their way again with a worn-out fibre-clutch. Their own particular car now ran at five and twenty miles an hour along a couple of miles of level road, and then down a three-mile hill right into Chalkminster, where every street is as flat as a comic paper.

The driver pulled up at the Market Cross, with the Chalkshire Arms on one side of him, and the Electra Garage on the other.

"Is anything really the matter with it?" inquired the lady. She still suspected it had been merely temper.

"I expect the fibre-clutch is worn out," replied the driver.

"Will it take long to get it mended?" asked the lady, wondering what she could do in Chalkminster for perhaps an hour or two.

"No, ma'am, not more than three or four days."

She did not believe this for a moment. Chastened as his manner was, and void of bias, she felt sure he was glad the car had gone wrong. Till ten days ago he had been driving a brand-new twenty-two h.p. four cylinder; and could not but think meanly of an 8 h.p. one cylinder, that would be in its 'teens in a year or two.

"Well, ask them over there," she said, glancing across the road, "and come and tell me what they say—in half an hour. I shall go for a walk and come back here to tea." This time her glance indicated the Chalkshire Arms.

"I suppose I'm a beast," she added to herself, after perceiving that good accommodation was only guaranteed for man and the latter.

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The driver touched his cap, and the lady walked away. It was not market day, and in the market square (which was triangular), there was no great concourse. In the middle a bronze gentleman, of a deep sooty black, stood on a square block of granite, holding a top hat in one hand, and a sort of map in the other. Another gentleman with his hat on his head, was steadfastly refusing to buy a pale canary from a slatternly woman who kept obtruding the very small cage on his notice as if she conceived him to be near-sighted. A chemist's boy, with three bottles of medicine in a large open basket, was watching two growling dogs, in hopes they were about to fight, and whistling as he gazed; partly to keep time to his tune, and partly, perhaps, because the medicine was to be shaken before taken, he shook it before taking it wherever it had to go, by waving the basket rhythmically, and so joggling the bottles together.

An elderly lady (all ladies in Chalkminster were elderly) came out of a draper's shop, where she had bought a packet of pins, and turned down Close Gate on her way to the Minster. A Minor Canon, who lodged over the ironmonger's, came out of the private door and made obvious efforts not to overtake her, which was difficult, as he was also bound for the Minster and was by nature quicker in his movements than the elderly lady. Outside the furniture-dealer's a man in a white apron was arranging a chest of drawers over a stain in a second-hand carpet. The lady of the motor-car noted all this in her desultory fashion, and also that all the houses which had not been re-fronted about eighty years ago had irregular gables: and that there were pens for cattle across the "square" in one of which a lean sow seemed to have been forgotten since last market-day. As a matter of fact, the chemist had bought her, but had not yet finished building her sty, out of some packing cases, in his back garden. He presently walked across with her tea, in the shape of an old Britannia metal dish-cover full of scraps. The motor-car lady, who was not elderly, turned down Close Gate, and immediately saw the Minster at the end of it. It was of mellow red sandstone, and had two western towers, from one of which a single bell was meekly hinting the approach of the hour for prayer.

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All round the church was a wide lawn of exquisite turf, broken here and there by an immense yew tree and by a few gravestones, mostly leaning back as though to get a better view of the central spire. This was the close; on two sides were rows of irregular, delightful houses, some gabled, some battlemented, and none less than two or three centuries old. On the third side was the Bishop's Palace, which looked like a Tudor hall that had wandered in for company from the country; its gardens were shut in by a high wall of flint, with bath-stone coping and gateway. On the fourth side was the deanery and the river.

Out of one of the houses, which had something the air of a small Oxford college—say Wadham—trooped a score of boys, with odd flat caps, such as the Elizabethan bishops wear in their portraits, and with little stiff ruffs instead of collars. A bored-looking young man, in a Master's gown, walked halfway down the line on one side: the rear was brought up by a lad of sixteen with very inky fingers, and a boy of about thirteen whose angelic face was slightly bulged on one side by a lump of toffee he was anxious to finish before getting into church.

They all passed quite close to the motor-car lady, and the wide-open blue eyes of the angelic boy surveyed her with alert attention and appreciation.

She made up her mind to go in and hear the singing. Not specially given to frequent the offices of her own religion, she had seldom been present, except as a bridesmaid, at those of the Established Church. The music might be good, and she had nothing on earth to do.

The string of boys disappeared through a small, low door near the chapter-house, by which the Minor Canon had also entered; the elderly lady had gone in by a much larger door on the same side, and the motor-car lady followed her.

The Minster was even more beautiful inside than out; and if it had not been service-time, a young verger of sepulchral manners would have offered to show the stranger round: when not so engaged he spent most of the day reading Télémaque (in a spiritual binding), for he was a studious person and anxious to improve himself. At this particular moment he was emerging from the

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vestry, with a sort of sceptre in his hand, in front of the Dean, an Honourable and Very Reverend gentleman in a scarlet hood with rose-silk lining. The Dean of Chalkminster at that time was a very well-known personage: rigid in his belief that all English people should belong to the English Church, but not at all of opinion that any member of it need believe anything in particular that it taught. Side by side, in front of the verger, walked the diocesan chancellor, who was five foot one in his boots, and the sub-dean, who stood six foot three in his socks. The former had written a book on the Seven Sacraments, which rather went to show there should really be one or two more; the latter was at that present engaged on a course of sermons calculated to prove that the two he was supposed to accept were not really sacraments at all, but useful ceremonies for those who liked them.

This couple walked behind our friend the Minor Canon, who was portly and important, in a black and scarlet hood, and a real Canon of meagre deportment, and insignificant build, in a master's hood with very shabby and discoloured rabbitskin.

Before them went the choirmen, and in the van walked the twenty boys, carrying their flat hats in their hands, and surpliced to the ankles.

The procession filed into the chancel, while the congregation stood up: it consisted of our elderly lady and eight others, all demurely clad in some approximation to the fashions of the year before last; and there was an anæmic young man of some eight and thirty summers, who was deaf and dumb, and presently began making the responses on his fingers.

The motor-car lady sat to view afar off, with a crusaders' monument on her right. His effigy on the top had been deprived of its nose by some Cromwellian soldier whose iconoclastic prejudice was stronger than his military sympathies.

The opening exhortation of the service was given by the precentor in a peculiar voice, which was neither chanting nor speaking, and seemed to the motor-car lady merely inhuman. The Confession was really chanted, and pleased her better; but the precentor had it all to

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himself again in the absolution. The motor-car lady began to be inattentive and to occupy herself with the beauty of the place, which might indeed excuse the distraction of one who saw it for the first time.

Ecclesiastically minded she was not: but her eye for every sort of beauty was keen and appreciating. Bad Catholic as she was, a poignant, wistful regret seized her that a fane so exquisite should be lost to the faith that had created it. Would she herself have been better had she lived in those ages of faith that had borne blossoms like these up and down the land?

Her own life was lived in the midst of that which we call the world, and had been formed and coloured by it; but the form was meaningless and uncertain, the colours staring, unharmonized, and confused.

She was still young, but youth was gone, prodigally spent hither and thither, and nothing bought. Youth must go, every golden day of it must be paid out, and cannot be taken back; but need its treasure be spent for nought?

Her time had been given to pleasure—base-born sister of happiness. Had she ever been happy? For answer, rose to memory days of childhood, when, she knew, the things that made the happiness had been hers by no monopoly of wealth and rank. A farmer's child, a peasant's, may be as happy, and in the same way.

When pleasure had become her deliberate object, had it ever greatly pleased?

They were at the psalms now; and the sounds that lifted the great singer's words up to the vaulted roof were beautiful enough to draw back her attention from accusing self.

The service up to this had not in the least interested her; to her it had seemed lifeless, flat, and simply dull. But the psalm they were singing was lovely in itself, and not unworthy of it were the serene, plain airs of the chant.

"O Lord, my God, Thou art become exceeding glorious;
Thou art clothed with Majesty and Honour.
Thou deckest Thyself with light as it were with a garment;

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And spreadest out the heavens like a curtain.
Who layeth the beams of His chambers on the waters;
And maketh the clouds His chariot, and walketh upon
the wings of the wind.
He laid the foundations of the earth
That it never should move at any time.
Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment;
The waters stand in the hills."

The men's voices took the strophe of each verse, and the boys caught the antistrophe from them and lifted it up to heaven in an exquisite gust of melody that was as pure and fragrant as a breeze among fields.

"Thou hast set them their bounds which they shall not
pass,
Neither turn again to cover the earth.
He sendeth the springs into the rivers;
Which run among the hills.

All beasts of the field drink thereof:
And the wild asses quench their thirst:
Besides them shall the fowls of the air have their
habitation:
And sing among the branches."

As the boys' voices seized this last antistrophe, and flung it among the woven arches, there really seemed a bird-like gladness in their swift, clear carolling; the poignant delight of young, unvexed creatures, an ecstasy of youth and revelling creation.

"The trees of the Lord also are full of sap:
Even the cedars of Lebanus which He hath planted,
Wherein the birds make their nests:
And the fir-trees are a dwelling for the stork.
The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats;
And so are the stony rocks for the conies."

She had smiled, a small half-bitter smile, at her own expense when they had sung of the wild asses quenching their thirst: was not she herself such a wild ass as the prophet-singer meant? And how unquenched her thirst! Now, again, she wondered of the high hill that is a refuge

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for the wild goat: she knew herself to be of the goats, and the old wistful cry echoed in her, "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help." But the conies are a foolish people, and like them she had chosen the stony rocks for her dwelling.

"The lions roaring after their prey
Do seek their meat from God.
The sun ariseth, and they get them away together
And lay them down in their dens."

So the sublime eternal poem was waved, like a banner of fair sound, from side to side, and she listened almost rapt to the end. Her real self was an artist's, and the cry of the artist found its echo in her. But the perfect song came only not from a humanist, but from a mystic, who, through the golden screen of nature, saw its Master and Artificer. It was not only poetry, but a passionate personal aspiration and longing. And that too she felt; the hunger for supreme beauty, unsatisfied by all the loveliness lying lower than the supreme, that *must* be fed and cannot fill itself here.

Oddly enough, her ever-vagrant, loose tag of association carried her imagination to Narcissus, tortured by his wistful quest of perfection in beauty: certain that every finite instalment of loveliness seen must hint at an infinite completeness of beauty not yet seen—and she pitied him, with a personal sympathy, for his pagan failure and anticlimax. And yet the *imago* he had found in the water, with all heaven in its depths, had an original behind it, not down there but up above himself, where he had not looked.

The precentor was giving out the anthem. . . . Again she rallied her errant fancies and was ready to listen. At first there came low and sweet breathings from the organ, that lost themselves in the wilderness of arch and dainty-groined roof and aisle. Then one boy's voice broke on the stillness, rising almost with the fluttering agony of a lark that leaves the plain for heaven.

"O that I had wings like a dove!"

To every syllable there was a note, and each note rose higher than the last, without strain or effort, but as it seemed with a passion of longing let loose. Then

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it dropped; as though the flight attempted had been at too supreme a mark; almost with a gasp; and rose again, indomitably, from a note much lower than the last, much higher than the first.

"O that I had wings . . ."

And again the voice fell, as if wounded, fluttering earthward a second time.

Now the men's voices, going back really on the words of the singer of Israel.

"Hear my prayer, O God! And hide not Thyself from my petition."

"Take heed to me," rang out a dozen boys' voices together.

"And hear me: how I mourn in my prayer and am vexed."

"The enemy crieth so," sang one, "and the ungodly cometh on so fast," wailed all together, men and boys, "for they are minded to do me a mischief; so maliciously are they set against me. My heart is unquiet within me. And the fear of death is fallen upon me . . . a horrible dread hath overwhelmed me."

It was one low baritone voice that sang the last foreboding words alone; and died down like a moan of shivering wind. Then that boy-voice rose up again, beginning higher than at first, and lifting itself, a note for every word, "O that I had wings like a dove! O that I had wings . . . For then would I flee away, and be at rest."

It seemed impossible that at such a height the voice should hold itself, quivering, without falling; but it did, all the antistrophe of the verse being sustained almost on one note, like a recitative.

The lady by the broken-nosed crusader had heard the best singers in Europe, and had often heard them unmoved, or with only the artistic surface of her taste compelled to a shallow appreciation. The singing of this boy moved her to something deeper, more inward, than mere admiration. No doubt there was more than the exquisite, clean voice, fresh as a ripple; there were the words, there was the place, with the wistful memories it had called up. And above all there was the personal appeal to her thought of herself.

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"O that I had wings like a dove! Lo, then would I get me away far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would make haste to escape, because of the stormy wind and tempest."

Of course it was on herself that the tide of feeling pushed back. Is it not always so when we are moved? Emotion must be intimate, and unless it be personal it can hardly be true emotion at all, but only that artistic flutter that is but its parody.

She had never defended herself, but now she condemned; because she knew herself accused, by irresponsible spying judgments, of external faults she had never fallen into, she had held herself, hardly, above criticism; nevertheless she, now at least forced to be explicit with herself, condemned.

She had married, almost as a child, with a woman's worldliness and cynicism, without love, or the pretence of love; telling herself that she was not made for love, or capable of it. Her husband, no better-born than herself, was of higher rank, and much greater fortune; and he had been willing to marry her at any price. That was his part of their common fault. He had flattered himself that he would teach her love: believing that she yet knew nothing of it, but sure that she could learn. Perhaps he had tried to teach too soon, perhaps he should have taught first and married afterwards. Anyway, he had been conscious of failure: and divined repulsion very quickly, when it was too late. With a child's reckless petulance, she had shown herself unwilling to learn, and, without words, reminded him that he had been warned. Why should he try to force her to do what she had declared herself incapable of doing?

Then he left her to herself and her wilfulness: and immersed himself in such public interests as his high talents and station almost demanded. And she, glad as she thought to be free, lived for pleasure and brilliance. No one, except her husband, gave her credit for innocence; nor had she much right to complain—to no one did she complain; least of all to him. But pleasure is a dull book except for the truly dull, and its countless volumes have a pitiless monotony. After five years of married life her youth, at barely three-and-twenty, was all staled

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away in skin-deep pleasures that were already become laborious in their routine.

Latterly she had rebelled against the tedious externality of her life. Why not, for her also, love? She had long ago known that she could love, but the man she could have loved was blind, not through love, but, as she thought, through indifference. She was too trivial for him, too shallow and too worldly: she knew, bitterly, that he despised her. High rank and great wealth he held, with his other great talents, for noble uses; for her they had been vulgar passports to pleasure.

But there were others, more than one, though one especially, ready; she knew very well that "love" was open to her if she chose; and she, half earnestly, half recklessly, was on the verge of readiness.

She had done none of the evil things laid to her charge; but presently she might. She was already angry, and that is one step forward on the bad way she was half willing to walk. There were two people she could wound —herself for certain, and the pain of some wounds tempts those who are grown stale with shallow emptiness of emotion. As for him, the husband she now could really love, she was not so sure that she could hurt him. At any rate, she might try.

She hesitated, and he who hesitates is not always lost. Meanwhile she bought, out of her own purse, the cheap motor-car in which we saw her first, and started in it she knew scarcely whither: though she did know that the way she was taking to-day led her near a place to which she was urged rather than invited. She might go there; she left it to caprice and the chapter of accidents.

The first accident had landed her here within the sound of that boy's voice. Sometimes we turn wantonly to chance, and find a pitiful Providence standing in her place.

Anthems, we know, are not always taken from one scripture, and he who had wished to wed his music to these words had tagged others to them from a different place.

"Though ye have lien among the pots," cried the boy's voice, "yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, that

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is covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold." And on these words, note by note, the voice fluttered slowly down, like the lark that tears herself from heaven to her lowly home among the tangled grass.

The nine elderly ladies had gone home to tea in their prim, safe houses round the close; the Minor Canon was walking serenely to his lodging over the ironmonger's, briskly now, for there was no demure damsel of forty whom he feared to overtake. The Dean, who had no ear for music, and had heard the anthem with decorous inattention, was hanging up his hood behind his study door. The twenty King's choristers were released to play, and one of them, with an angelic face, was absorbed in listening to a terrible German band, most unconscious that he had been a turning-point in some one's life.

The band, all brass, made a deafening noise, but the tune was popular, and the King's chorister liked it. And he was a careless, inattentive boy, absent-minded, as people of one idea at a time are apt to be. A motor-car, not at all like the lady's, very big and smart, came swiftly round the corner; no doubt it had sounded its horn, but the German brass was much louder and more strident: and for that matter the very distinguished-looking gentleman, of not more than eight or nine and twenty, who sat behind the chauffeur, was giving instruction into his ear, so that the man's head was turned over his shoulder as it ought not to have been.

The gentleman had also been to hear part of the service in the Minster, and had walked thence to rejoin his car at the garage where he had left it to take in petrol. He had not been in time for the psalms, but he had heard the anthem, and had watched a lady while she listened, and with interest. He knew her face well, but had never seen a like expression upon it: nor ever seen her pray—or thought that she could.

He did not see her now, as she insanely rushed from the footway across the road to save the boy. Probably there was no real danger for the boy, but she thought there was, and she owed him, as she thought, all life that might be hers.

But whether he needed saving or no, she saved him—clumsily, and not at all prettily; she simply rushed at

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him and cannoned him away, just in time for him, just too late for herself.

The car was not going very quickly, seeing it was in the town; it was, however, very heavy, a huge sixty-horse-power touring car. The boy, whose face may have been, for the moment, rather indignant than angelic, was safe enough, though sprawling on the dusty road. The lady was safe too, passed beyond this place of temptations, whither the soul is vexed no longer, and where no fresh stains can gather, but the old are slowly burned out in the great fires of love. There was no sign of pain upon her dead face, or fear, or trouble; its childishness had almost come back, without the wilfulness; as her husband bent over it he saw its innocence, not saddened, but lightened by a tender, wistful wonder and sweet awe.

He had tried to teach her love, somewhat impatiently, and had, within this half-hour, meant to try again, less confidently, more gently. But she had gone to a greater Master for her lesson, and had, at the threshold of His school, learned something. For the Teacher Himself said that greater love none can show than to lay down life for a friend; and she had esteemed the boy her friend, whose singing had turned her back from the temptation she had played with.

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THE HAPPY END OF SISTER ELIZABETH

It was Christmas Eve.

The traditional, muggy, damp- and dolour of that season lay heavy on the big town, and not least heavily on the Convent of St. Blazey. There is something rather jovial, if not positively incendiary, in the sound of the Saint's name; but there is nothing in the least cheerful about the big grey building that is called after him on the edge of the town of Dudport. It is the last tenement in that direction, and it looks like the very last one would wish to enter in any direction whatever. It does not appear which side of the long range of buildings ought to be called the front; but that portion which flanks the road shuts its dull eyes upon it, for every one of the low, arched windows is boarded up. This may have been to prevent the glass from being broken by naughty boys with a low idea of the conventual life, or it may have been to preclude the possibility of the sisters flattening their noses against the panes, in the impotent endeavour to gaze upon the fascinations of the world as presented by Phœnix Street. But this last explanation is eminently unlikely, for Phœnix Street is not calculated to suggest a longing for domestic life. The long row of small, dingy houses that face the Convent of St. Blazey is inhabited by many more families than there are houses, and resignation is the most jocund sentiment that expresses itself in any of their faces. Nor, indeed, could the nuns have got very near the glass even if they had tried, for their coifs stuck out a good twelve inches in advance of their plaintive noses. Finally, there had never been anything like enough nuns to fill the other three sides of the elongated quadrangle, let alone this

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one. Away from the town the ground drops abruptly, so that the garden, in spite of its high wall, is commanded by any one who should have the curiosity to sit and watch it from Batten Hill over against the convent, in the direction of the open fields.

Between Batten Hill and that on the side of which the house of St. Blazey is built, is a tidal creek, full of water twice in twenty-four hours, and full of a powerful perfume at other seasons. What with that and the high wall, the convent is well secured against intrusion.

It is not reported that any one ever tried to intrude.

Indeed, there was nothing like so much intrusion even on the part of "sisters" as had been expected. The Institute of St. Blazey had been founded far away in the forties by a Puseyite Rector (as he was called then), who had hit on this ingenious device for ridding his pleasant rural parish of a number of ladies of more than marriageable age, who expected more of him in the direction of asceticism and mediævalism generally, than he had found at all convenient to concede. His curate, a hungry-eyed young man, who spent his evenings in belabouring himself with a bristly hair-brush, and could not, or would not, play whist, the founder appointed chaplain. And there was intense peace in the parish of Highcomb-Stogis.

To do him justice, the founder had advanced substantial sums towards the erection of the conventual buildings, and as long as he lived had not been negligent of its interest. He sent thither a dribbling succession of ladies, whose taste for discomfort rendered them awkward members of a family; and he also sent them female inebriates, to reform, and extensive orders for Church embroidery, to make.

But for ten years this benefactor had been dead, and the hungry-eyed chaplain was also dead, and his two successors had married and accepted college livings in the Midlands. One, indeed, had married the Lady Prioress, which had been felt to be very grievous, though there was no vow of celibacy in the Institute of St. Blazey. The original sisters had been loud in demanding it, but the prudent founder (who drew up the rules) had not thought it "necessary."

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At present there was no regular chaplain, one of the curates of the neighbouring church of St. Agatha (always a High-Church Saint, you will notice) coming in like a sort of ecclesiastical charwoman to do all that was necessary.

After the death of the founder, few and far between were the arrivals of new sisters; and more than one of the old ones, finding that rheumatism and monasticism made but dreary companions on the downward slope of life, had gone back to "the world."

Some few had followed in the steps of that Sister Superior who had espoused the chaplain; but most had settled down into furnished apartments and a sort of chronic district visitorhood.

A few weeks before this Christmas Eve the last defection had taken place, and Sister Pertinacia had sunk back into Miss Pridster; that which had been Sister Pertinacia having disappeared from the view of Sister Elizabeth round the corner of Phœnix Street, in the direction of the Dudport terminus of the London and North-Western Railway.

Poor Sister Elizabeth!

She turned back into the convent and went to Evensong all by herself in the grim chapel that had been built to hold sixty. There was the marble slab that commemorated the founder, and the humbler slab of unpolished slate that told of the meek virtues of the hungry-eyed curate, who had never sought to wound any one but himself. There was no reminder of the Sister who had married his successor, but nothing was needed to recall her to Sister Elizabeth. They had been cousins and schoolfellows (a long while ago), and Sister Elizabeth often thought of her: now and then, indeed, heard from her. It was shocking, but true, that the late Superioress was not a bit compunctious.

"The fact is, my dear," she had said to her cousin, when originally breaking to her what was about to take place; "the fact is, we are all a mistake. We are neither fish, nor flesh, nor good red-herring. We are not proper nuns, and we are not meant to be. And there is really nothing for us all to do here. We have two inebriates to reform among the ten of us"—(there

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were ten then)—" and they really cannot stand it. No one could expect them to. Many parishes find it more than they can stand to have one parson trying to convert two or three thousand of them. If there were five parsons to each parishioner it never could be borne. For my part I feel it a duty to reduce the pressure on those poor inebriates."

So she had gone away, and the chaplain had gone too; and Sister Elizabeth still liked her (which the new chaplain had told her she should strive against).

But all that was years ago. The late Superioress was (she wrote) about to chaperon her eldest girl to her first dance on Boxing Day (St. Stephen's Day, as poor Sister Elizabeth said to herself with gentle reprobation). And now, on Christmas Eve, alone in the echoing chapel, the solitary nun read her meek prayers, and trembled a little at the ghostly shadows.

She was not absolutely alone in the convent. Far away in the kitchen, where was provision for the cooking of meals for three score nuns and two score " penitents," one of those inebriates for whose sake that former Superioress had abandoned monachism, sat dozing. She was, to be just, no longer an inebriate. She was a very harmless, easy-natured old body, with no worse fault than a tendency to palpitations, which quite a small glass of white-wine negus was sufficient to arrest.

She was a sort of lay sister, and was the sole servant the " Community " retained, except the rheumatic old man to whose undivided neglect the great weed-grown garden was intrusted. And he, of course, was an " extern," and did not reside in the convent, where there was certainly plenty of room for him.

Sister Ginneypot (the lay sisters were called by their surnames by way of distinction) sat dosing by the little fire that burned rather sulkily in the corner of the big grate, as if it resented the intrusion of so many bricks where coal was meant to be. She had been out into the town to buy the Christmas dinner, and had added the very last ingredient to the Christmas pudding. On her way home she had met a croney who had asked her in, and given her a wee taste of something to warm her; and the " Community Grocer " had presented her with

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a bottle that (he jocosely stated) contained Holy Water, Irish Holy Water. She preferred Irish Holy Water, he thought. The Scotch Holy Water had a smoky. . . . This present was only for Christmas. It is fair to say that no such bottle was introduced into the convent by Sister Ginneypot at other times.

"P'r'aps I ought to tell Sister Elizabeth," she had said to herself, before even now doing so; "but if I did I dare say she'd think she ought to forbid it; and I know it would make her wretched to do it, she's that kind-hearted. I think I'd just better say nothing about it, but keep it in case of them palpitations."

It was very fortunate that she had done so, for, as it happened, a slight attack had supervened shortly after her return from the town, and had been arrested instantly by a very frugal application of the grocer's remedy. And now Sister Ginneypot had sunk into a doze. She was roused by the sound of the big bell ringing the Angelus, and knew that it was time to take Sister Elizabeth's supper into the Refectory. In former days the Angelus had been rung by one of the lay sisters; but nowadays Sister Elizabeth rang it herself, and it served as an intimation that she was ready for her supper.

It was a very frugal meal, and the meagre commons looked all the more dismal at the end of the long table in the Refectory, with a napkin by way of table-cloth.

There was no fire in the big room, and its emptiness resounded. There were plenty of smaller rooms where Sister Elizabeth would have been more comfortable; but it was a point of honour with her to keep up every point of rule and custom unchanged. The great bell rang at five to bid her rise, though it was in truth herself who rang it; and all day long it kept up its admonitions to prayer, or frugal sustenance, or dismal recreation.

At the end of the long table Sister Elizabeth took her place, and, after the long Latin grace, sat down. The constitutions ordered that there should be reading aloud during meals, and Sister Ginneypot mounted the lectern. It was the life of a Cornish Saint, and the names were obstinately unphonetic; it is probable that the reader suffered less than her hearer, but both suffered a good deal. Still, the rule was kept.

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Bread and butter is not an inspiriting diet, and tepid tea is not a cheerful drink, but Sister Elizabeth had long ceased to look forward to her meals with any pleasurable expectation. She ate and she drank, and so her body was made to provide a decent covering for her soul, and there was an end of it. Here and there indeed the body was rather threadbare, and the soul peered out wistfully; but there was no one to see it.

No doubt the life of St. Ewan is a very interesting work, but to-night it seemed hard to follow; the narrative of its marvels dropped on the ear of Sister Elizabeth as the rain fell on the roof, making a noise but effecting no entrance. Her thoughts were astray. and rambling along pleasant secular ways for years forgotten. The letter of her cousin had wakened the echoes of long silent voices. Merry, foolish laughter and easy jestings came out of the solemn stillness of life's lost youth. For no reason, there was a special memory of one afternoon's country pleasure when they had all been girls together; a very simple pleasuring among the reaped fields and blackberry-gemmed lanes. There was no Sister Elizabeth in those days; only a merry girl, with a girl's tender secret, and one at hand who alone should have read it—and did not.

After supper the two women went to the chapel and made their "particular examination" of the day's faults. Of these vain recollections Sister Elizabeth pleaded guilty before the great tribunal that must, it would seem, have cognisance of some very minor matters. But the thoughts would still come back. And being again alone in the Recreation Room they crowded thicklier than before.

And there arose a voice of reproof. "Had she not wasted the life that God had given her?" it asked. "To what purpose was this waste?" Then she bade herself remember who it was that had first complained of the waste of pouring out all on those Divine Feet. "But hast thou?" urged the voice. "Was it love for Him, and not in despair of thyself, that thou didst come hither to hide thy bitter wounds and disappointed hopes?"

She knew she had ill-treated Him. He had never

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called her out into the desert, and she, out of weariness, had gone thither. It was all for herself. She was, in truth, no nun. In all these void years she had kept rigorously to the rule by which she had chosen to be bound, but it had never bound her heart. Her body she brought into this prison, but her soul was a stranger in these sad cloisters. Often in the street had she passed a Roman Catholic Sister of Charity, and had known that there was nothing of common between them. This would never be her happy home. The language that she gabbled here would for ever be to her a foreign tongue. And yet there was nothing to bind her but her own will. Who would blame her if she followed the rest who had gone back into the warm world, and refused to live thus in a grimmer loneliness than that of Stylites, whose pillar was crowded round the base with watching crowds?

Partly, it was out of some half-felt point of honour, that she would not desert the sinking ship: would not abandon the post where none was left to enforce her presence; and partly she stayed, having nowhither to go. She was almost a girl when she had come hither; now she was more than middle-aged. There was a new generation; and out in the big world she would be, after all, strange and bewildered. The prisoner who has chafed against his chains for twenty years walks awkwardly without them when they are struck off. And to whom should she go?

> "Our sons inherit us, our looks are strange,
> And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy."

The fire blazed and crackled, for Sister Ginneypot had piled up a good one in honour of Christmas Eve; but the big bare room was full of spectres. Last year there had been still three of them; a poor little community, but, still, enough to greet each other and make some chastened merriment; and it seemed now that they must all be dead—though in truth they were not—and Sister Elizabeth the last survivor.

The rain beat harder against the draughty window, and the wind was risen.

She got up, and, taking a hand lamp, started on a ramble through the empty convent. A winding stair

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led up into the roof, and higher into a sort of beacon-tower, whence one could see out, beyond the town, to sea. It had been one of their founder's notions to have a sort of storm-light there; but it had proved too costly and difficult. But now up into this tower she climbed, and peered out seawards. There was a moon, but the driving clouds often hid it. She waited for one of the intervals, and strained her eyes out into the unhappy night. Beyond the blurred squalors of the town, the tumbling waste of ocean glimmered grey and white in the moon. Often in her narrow bed she had sat up and prayed for those at sea: for those who even then might be going down to the sea in ships to their restless slumber on the drifting floor of the great deep. And now a special passion of compassion seized her for them, and there was a wild force of imperious demand in her supplication. Over the wicked sea her own hopes had passed away and returned not: it was an enemy for ever to her.

And then, through the chill and sounding corridors, she took her downward way, the flickering lamp she carried throwing shadows that might have made her start, but that older shadows were crowding so thickly round her. She hurried from them, but they still overtook her.

At one window she stood and looked out again; not seawards now, but over the narrow plot of ground that had been blest for their burying-place. The grass was very rank and tall there, and lay flat in places where the wind had beaten it. But there were few graves. One great white cross stood out in the midst and gleamed in the cold light as the clouds hurried from the moon. It marked the grave of the first of the young community to leave it. She had gone from it out into that darkness that lies around the world, beyond which is the light. She had died full of the first eager hope and fervour, and without suspicion of the swift disruption that was to come. Her name as a nun had been the same as Sister Elizabeth had borne in the world, Alice.

And on the base of the cross was written: "Sister Alice, June 17th, 1850."

From the foot of the cross a man arose as Sister Elizabeth looked; a man who had been kneeling there,

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and who now stood and kissed the wet stone. How had he got thither? Who was he?

She continued on her way, and, coming near the kitchen, looked in there.

"Oh, sister! I went to look for you, and couldn't find you," cried the lay sister, with some fervour. "Just now there came a ringin' at the big gate, and I wondered whoever it could be. I knew it could not be the parcels from the grocer, for they'd come a'ready. But I looked through the grating and saw it was a man—a gentleman, it was easy to see that. He asked if there was a Sister Alice here, and I said, 'No; she was dead long before my time.' He did not seem surprised; he only sighed, and said he had heard that long ago, and only wanted to make sure. He had seen it in a paper. He asked where she was buried, and I told him here; then he begged if he might go and see her grave. I went to ask you, and I let him through to the cemetery. He spoke as if he had been—very fond of her."

Sister Elizabeth shook her head.

"I dare say it is her brother," she observed.

But the lay sister was quite sure it was not a brother.

"He did not look a bit like as if he was her brother; and besides, he would have known for certain whether she was dead or not if he had been her brother."

Then Sister Elizabeth went back to the Community Room, and the lay sister went to let the stranger out again.

She came soon to Sister Elizabeth, and seemed unwontedly talkative. It was plain she had woven a romance concerning the strange visitor and the dead nun whose grave he had come to visit.

"He made me show him the stall in chapel with her name over it," she said; "and he knelt down there and prayed. He asked to see the place where she sat in Refectory, but I could not tell him that. He had been abroad, he said, for more than twenty years"—the lay sister's hearer started)—"and had hardly thought ever to come home again; but something seized him that perhaps she was not dead, and he could not rest without coming home to make for certain sure. It's rather disappointing as he should ha' come for nothing, arter all, isn't it?"

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"He has satisfied himself," said Sister Elizabeth. "It is dreadful to be in uncertainty."

But the lay sister shook her head.

"Not much satisfaction, I reckon," she said. "He must have been a very handsome gentleman when he was a young man. But that weren't yesterday, nor yet Tuesday. Not as he's what you'd call old. But he's not, as you might say, a pullet or a cockerel, I *should* say."

Sister Elizabeth stared into the red embers of the fire, and those shadows crowded closer.

"His name," said the lay sister, "is Trevethick."

A common Cornish name enough. Why did it make the nun grow pale beneath her coif, and almost make her cry out as a child when one hurts it suddenly?

"He went away?" she asked, presently.

"Oh, yes; he's gone. I asked him if he'd like to see you, Sister Elizabeth; but he said there was no need. He said he should go back abroad where he came from. A ship goes out to-night, he says, from here."

Finding Sister Elizabeth not talkative, the lay sister asked her if there would be anything else; and being told "No," withdrew to bed. She rejoiced, poor old woman (like the Saints), in her bed, and it was her habit to proceed thither betimes.

Over the fire Sister Elizabeth sat alone; and the shadows came and sat beside her, nearer than before.

"He is alive, and he still remembers. It was for me he came. Of course he thought that I, who was Alice then, became Sister Alice here. And he came for me. Back again abroad, but whither I know not. O God, Thou hast taken Thy revenge! He was here at hand, and he passed by."

Had she not always been wrong? At first so impatient, then so proud? And had she not in truth half hoped to spoil two lives when she had thrown her own away? Thinking herself jilted, she could brook no delay for the sake of certainty, but had flung out the bitter lees of her misery at the feet of God, and been willing that he should suffer. How she had lied to Heaven, thrusting her empty life (as one might, in extremest meanness, fling an empty purse to a beggar) into the hands of God, as though it were a gift of generous free will!

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Hour after hour she sat there in the lonely room; and the mice came out to play, unheeding of her silent presence. The wind gathered and the rain drove fiercer, and down the hollow corridors of the convent whistled the night blast. Then, when the fire was long dead, she crept up, and once again strove to gaze out seaward from the beacon-tower. But now was no moonlight, and she could see no further than the blurred lights of the town beneath. The distance was all one blot of gloomy ink. Out into that darkness her hope had gone again.

Chilled and shivering, she crept away down to the draughty cell where she slept.

And at length she did indeed sleep. And at length morning came—the happy morning of God's birthday. The bells rang out their joyous clamour, and strove to make the shivering town believe that it was a glad morning. But still the dark rain fell, and the gusty draught whistled round the street corners.

As the people came from the churches in the afternoon, many noticed a sad-faced gentleman who drove past them in a dingy cab in the direction of the Convent of St. Blazey, though it did not occur to any of them to guess that he was going thither. He had a beautiful wreath beside him on the seat of the carriage, such as are placed upon the coffins of the dead; but this was all of myrtle and orange flowers. Coming to the convent, he rang at the big gate that was now so seldom opened, and in process of time was inspected through the small grating by Sister Ginneypot, and finally admitted.

"Thought you was gone back abroad," she observed candidly.

"We did start," he answered, "but it was a terrible night, and one of our propeller shafts broke down, so we had to put back. I want to go and put this on the grave."

Sister Ginneypot looked at the wreath; but she shook her head.

"Not till I've been and arst Sister Elizabeth," she said. "Sister Elizabeth didn't seem best pleased as I let you in last night; and if you're comin' chronic you must get her lief first."

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So Mr. Trevethick was led to a "parlour," clinging to his wreath like a man overboard to a life-buoy; and Mrs. Ginneypot presented herself before the Community.

The Community was writing a letter—answering that of the late Lady Prioress, in fact—and had its back to her as she opened the door.

"He's come back," remarked Mrs. Ginneypot. She had been basting the turkey when called to the gate, and was still rather flushed and "short," as she would herself have put it.

"That gentleman—who was here last night?" Sister Elizabeth was a very sincere woman, and would not pretend to be in doubt of her meaning.

"Yes'm; he's got a wreath so big as yer head to put on the grave. But I said not till you'd given lief first."

The wreath was, in truth, very much bigger than the Community's head, even including the coif; but this was a figure that Sister Ginneypot employed, without prejudice, to express great size, whether she was treating of a diamond or a first-class cruiser.

"There's his card," added she, levelling it at the Community.

"Where is he?"

"In the first parlour. They're both there. He brought it with 'im."

"Very well, I'll go and speak to him."

Nevertheless, the Community did not rise immediately, but seemed to intend going at its leisure. It is a point of honour with all nuns to keep visitors to the parlour waiting an unconscionable time. It would have an eager, worldly appearance to hurry to them. That much of the monastic spirit still clung to the Community.

So Mrs. Ginneypot preceded it.

"She's comin' to speak to you."

"Oh!" said the gentleman.

"That's sister Elizabeth," explained Mrs. Ginneypot, who thought him apathetic.

"Ah! that's your—what do you call it?—head nun, isn't it?"

"She's all that's left," admitted the lay sister, in a burst of confidence; "she's the only one."

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"Goodness! She has plenty of room here. The others all dead?"

"Some's dead," said Sister Ginneypot, "and some —isn't."

"Oh!" said the gentleman, not desiring to appear unduly inquisitive.

As he seemed to have no more to say, the lay sister returned to her turkey. Presently a soft step was heard outside, and the door opened. The "choir-nun's" dress was certainly more pleasing than that worn by Sister Ginneypot, but the great projecting coif left the face in deep shadow. In the dusk of that winter's day and of that gloomy little parlour, with its narrow Gothic window, one could not see much of Sister Elizabeth. One gathered that she was elderly; and she gathered as much of her visitor, though she hardly seemed to look at him.

"I think you want me?" said the quiet voice of the expiring Sister Elizabeth.

She sat down with a deathly feeling at her heart: a sickening sense as of sinking down, down through her feet, through the ground, into whatever lies down under the earth. She was in truth very pale and haggard, though the strange gentleman did not notice that; and she knew that she, Sister Elizabeth, was *in extremis*.

"I did not mean," said the gentleman, "to trouble you. But she—the lay sister, I think you call it—insisted on my obtaining your sanction before placing this wreath on the grave of one who lies here—one who was very dear to me."

He was certainly quite elderly. There was an elderly primness even in the way, sad as it was, of his allusion to the reason of his presence.

"All who knew Sister Alice loved her," said the quiet voice from out of the coif. "I was her school-fellow."

"Ah!" said the gentleman, with polite attention.

"Perhaps," said Sister Elizabeth, "you may have even heard her speak of me."

The gentleman did not, to say the truth, think it at all likely. Alice and he had had other things to talk of than her school-fellows. But he was far too civil to betray this.

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"If you would favour me, dear Madam,"—he might say "dear Madam"; was he not quite elderly, and was not she—besides being a Sister of St. Blazey—quite elderly also?) "if you would favour me with your name."

"My name," replied the quiet voice, which had become so quiet that now one could hardly hear it, "my name is Alice Pentowan."

"*That* was *her* name!" cried the gentleman, whose voice was not now at all quiet.

"Sister Alice? Nay, Sir; her name in the world was Sylvia Mallock."

"Then this wreath is *yours!*" cried the gentleman, pushing the orange flowers and myrtle towards her.

The expiring community of St. Blazey ate its Christmas dinner that day in the kitchen. That part of the convent was not part of the inclosure; and by selecting it, not only was the warmest and most cheerful apartment in the building chosen, but the Institute was enabled to sit down at the same festive table with its guest. Sister Elizabeth had at first suggested the Guest House for the accommodation of Mr. Trevethick, offering to wait upon him there; but, learning that no fire had been lighted there for thirteen years, he stoutly refused to have it uncorked for this occasion; in which spirited opposition he had been warmly supported by all that was left of Sister Ginneypot, who now knew all about it.

"Rubbidge!" she cried. "The Guest 'Ouse smells like a vaults, and is so damp as a churchyard. Why not take yer dinner in my kitchen, as is warm and dry, and do seem a bit comfortable? You 'ave yours first, and when you're done I'll set down to the survivements."

But it was settled they should all sit down together. And very comfortable they were. Mr. Trevethick grinned blandly whenever he caught Mrs. Ginneypot's eye, who never failed to chuckle audibly; and even the late Sister Elizabeth smiled happily in the recesses of her coif. It is not rash to assert that no such jovial feast was ever eaten before within the grey walls of the Convent of St. Blazey.

When they had finished, Mr. Trevethick observed, with some trepidation, that he supposed it was quite out of

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the question that he should smoke. But, as the founder had not foreseen that any of the sisters would be tempted in that direction, Sister Elizabeth had to admit that there was no veto upon it in the Constitutions.

So the pipe was lighted; and presently the gentleman looked round somewhat sheepishly.

"I suppose," he said, "that there is not such a thing as——"

"But there is, then!" cried Mrs. Ginneypot, producing the grocer's bottle with great hardihood, and chuckling more than ever—in concert, it must be admitted, with Mr. Trevethick.

Rather more than twenty-one days later a large Bill appeared upon the principal entrance to the Convent of St. Blazey, and an advertisement (which was a verbal reproduction of the bill) was inserted in various papers, the opening words of both being "For Sale. Highly suitable for a Convent, Monastery, or Roman Catholic Institution." And Mrs. Ginneypot (who had come in a cab to remove a few personal effects of hers and the late Sister Elizabeth's read it with great satisfaction.

"Very true," she said; "a deal more suitable. Them convents are draughty, uncomfortable things, not at all suitable to the Church of England.

Then she stepped into her cab, and rumbled off to join Mr. Trevethick at the railway station, who was to meet her there with the remains of the late Sister Elizabeth.

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THE SCHOOL-MISTRESS

I

MANY of Esther's acquaintances declared that it was "vulgar" of her to become a school-mistress; for some of her acquaintance *were* vulgar, as may happen to any of us.

These refined persons urged that her father was a clergyman (a fact of which Esther ought to have been aware, as she had written his sermons for several years), and that her "maternal uncle" was a bishop in New Zealand, on both of which accounts it appeared to be peculiarly incumbent on Esther not to let the family dignity down; and still more, that her grandfather on the one side had been a baronet, and on the other a canon of Windsor.

It was useless for Esther to plead, in stay of judgment, that her father approved of her original departure, or that the maternal bishop had never carried his maternity so far as to betray the slightest knowledge of her existence. The baronet and the canon were only pressed home the more fiercely, as though her perverseness necessitated a peculiarly heavy accentuation of the first syllable of the former's dignity, and as though her fault acquired a special heinousness from Windsor being the chapter to which her other grandsire had been attached.

Had Esther been an only daughter, or had her younger brethren and sisters still needed her care, she would have remained at home, for her mother had been long dead. But her next sister, Prudence, was but eighteen months her junior, and ought to have been eighteen years her senior. For Prudence had been born elderly, with a fine natural taste for priggishness and domestic supremacy, and, to do her justice, had never opposed in the least

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Esther's idea of leaving home. She merely suggested that it would be more "usual" if her sister should endeavour to earn her living as a governess in a private family or young ladies' school. But against that Esther was firm.

As a village school-mistress, she should have no mistress herself, her spare time would be her own, and, once past the assistant-mistress stage, would have house and garden to herself, and enough to live upon, with the same frugal comfort she had perceived in others. Wealth would be no more impossible than undesirable; Esther could imagine no contented affluence that was not withal frugal; hers was one of those unenterprising natures that shrink instinctively back from all excess—even the excess of physical prosperity.

The actual parting from home might have proved a wrench, but she was thankful to find it less than she had been prepared for. Prudence was not unkind, but undisguisedly glad to accede to the position of head of the house she was herself vacating. Jack was at sea, and she should not see less of him for going away. Bob had joined his regiment in India, and his letters would be no more infrequent than they had always been. Patience, her favourite of them all, was at school in Belgium. Her father seemed to perceive so little difference between his two eldest daughters that she could not possibly imagine he would miss her. Prudence would equally save him all trouble; perhaps, being of a more "managing" disposition, she would take even more off his hands. She would fearfully enjoy writing his sermons (and had, in fact, been accumulating matter almost from her infancy); and, her style being an irreproachable heaviness, more like what had been his own, he would probably deliver them with a greater ease and contentment; it would be like preaching in carpet slippers after long constraint in rather tight patent leathers.

It would have been a sharper wrench, perhaps, to part from Pot, the rather dilapidated terrier given her long ago by Jack before he went to sea, for the simple reason that he, and he alone, would have been heart-broken to see her go. But the pain of that parting was over already, for Pot had died the day before she left.

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Her last act at home was to bury him, and lay the sods herself that should prevent his grave from seeming raw and ugly.

As she drove to the little station the old white pony she had known more than half her life gave her a good deal of his hair, if not exactly in locks, in unstinting abundance. But Poley (short for Roley-Poley) was phlegmatic and used to departures—which he found no more troublesome than arrivals—and betrayed scarcely more emotion than her father or Prudence.

As the train (it was a branch line) moved leisurely away, she perceived her sister inviting an eligible neighbour, not of her own sex, to tea; while their father was inquiring of the stationmaster concerning a parcel that should have arrived by that train and evidently had not.

For the first time in her life Esther wondered if she missed something in it, and what, if so, it was.

II

Esther had never expected to find her new life free from disadvantages; unlike most people of character, her fault lay rather in expecting too little of life than too much.

Her first post was as assistant in the girls' school of a very small country town, where there was a school for boys adjoining; and here she had to live with the senior mistress, who, in addition to not being a lady herself, was a good deal aggrieved because Esther was.

In school hours she had the power, and at first the will, to domineer a good deal, and even to bully a little; in their free time she was captious and on the look-out for offence. Of her own "people" she talked boastfully, giving her assistant to understand that they were of a social elevation very much loftier than Esther might have suspected. If the latter alluded little to her own, it was "because she considered them too 'high' for discussion with a mere school-mistress." Had Esther fallen into this trap she would have been accused of bragging of her big connections.

Miss Rodd, as Esther readily perceived, nourished a not very secret admiration for Mr. Birch, the good-looking

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master of the neighbouring boys' school, who was a bachelor, a circumstance not at present to his discredit, provided it were not too long persisted in.

But Mr. Birch was thirty-three, and considered Miss Rodd, who might have been a year younger, as quite elderly; and, being ambitious, found himself attracted by the unusual social antecedents of the junior mistress, who had, moreover, a reasonable share of good looks, though few girls could have been less preoccupied by them.

But Esther had no matrimonial ideas, and had certainly none of marrying a Council schoolmaster; and, whatever Mr. Birch had been, he would have been repugnant to her taste. He was bumptious, perky, and intrusive; the most vulgar thing about him was his good looks, and his quickness and sharpness, almost amounting to cleverness, were uneasy and irritating.

Mr. Birch was, however, too ardent and too sanguine a suitor for his hopes to remain long concealed. Nor were they very easily dashed when their object had, rather tardily, awakened to them.

He was a young man hard to convince of what he did not wish to believe. Once he did bring himself to credit how unwelcome his attentions to Esther were, he was not slow to change them into slights. And, in so doing, he ended by over-reaching himself. For it promptly occurred to his not very elevated intelligence that an excellent way of annoying her would be to transfer his advances to her senior, and that with all convenient parade and emphasis.

Mr. Birch was a student of mankind and had learned as an axiom that all women are jealous of one another. As Esther did not seem at once aware of these attentions to Miss Rodd, he was driven to make them so very obvious and decided that that lady took immediate and serious advantage of them, so that, before he knew where he was, the schoolmaster found himself engaged, so hopelessly that it would have been very expensive, if not impossible, to get out of it.

Miss Rodd had a shrewd idea of how things had gone, and, oddly enough, was rather grateful to Esther for her share in it. And, now they were so soon to cease living together, she could afford to look less closely on her junior's faults. She gave her, therefore, a very excellent

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report which helped, no doubt, in the matter of Esther's certificate. But at last Esther herself had arrived at the dignity of full-blown school-mistress, with school assistants, and dwelling-house of her own. It had taken nearly five years, and she was a few months on the shady side of eight and twenty. As she sat of an evening by the warm red fire in her cosy parlour, she felt that she ought to be content.

Her income was sufficient; her little house pretty and comfortable, with a small but pleasant garden; the work suited her, and she knew that she suited it. And she was as free a woman as any in England. Not a human being had, or claimed, the right to interfere with or manage her.

What more could she want? Nothing; or, if anything, she did not know what. Can one's wants be important when we do not know what they are?

But may we not guess for Esther what hers were? Was she not too free? Was not her absolute freedom (or "freeness," as she called it) due to her loneliness? There was none to interfere with her, because none cared enough for her to have any interest in interference. She who is without "ties" must be unbound; but how chill such freedom is!

III

Esther was knitting in the bright firelight, and her neat though exiguous maid had not yet brought in the supper, whose aroma was so grateful in the cat's nostrils, when there came a knock at the outer door, and Esther herself arose to see who might want her.

Outside in the frosty moonlight a young man stood waiting, with a letter in his hand.

"Oh! Mr. Brandon! Come in," she said, for he was no stranger, and the cold was bitter and intense.

"I have brought you a note from my brother," explained her visitor as he came in, bringing the chill smell of the night with him.

They both sat down, and she took the letter, but did not open it.

As they sat in the bright light of the fire, chatting in the half-easy, half-perfunctory manner of acquaintances

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who meet frequently, but are not intimate, they presented contrasts that might have interested a physiognomist or character-student.

Esther seemed, and was, unconscious that the young man watched her; he, on the other hand, had a keen and irritated consciousness that she paid him merely the attention of politeness, and seldom even glanced up at him, though her occupation would have rendered it very easy.

He could not flatter himself she was thinking much of him; and it was obvious that, were he to go away, she would not think about him at all. He, however, did not go away, for he was making up his mind that he would force her to think about him—a good deal.

Esther was eight and twenty, but the past five years of steady work had robbed her of no charm of youth; her complexion had always been delicate, and was now even more so, and her skin had that bloom and smoothness that one often sees in a nun many years older than she was. Her figure was good, and she held herself unusually well. Bertram Brandon, as he studied her face, told himself, truly, that every feature was good. What was lacking? Why was she not in fact beautiful?

He asked her a question, and she looked up to answer it, her dark grey eyes meeting his own for a moment; they were large, clear, grave, certainly fine eyes. Her nose, too, was well formed, and her mouth excellent. What was the matter? Why did not her face satisfy him?

The expression, and there was no lack of it, was good too. But it missed something, and that absence spoiled, as he thought, the value of the rest.

There was no masculine hardness about Esther's face or Esther herself; no school-dame's magisterial firmness, or over-consciousness of authority. He, indeed, accused her of too much self-reliance, duly betrayed in her quiet manner; but young men who begin to be interested in young women are seldom pleased to detect in them too plentiful self-reliance. Suddenly a simile occurred to him: she made him think of a fine lamp that had never been lighted, and that, he told himself, explained what was lacking.

Could the lamp be lighted? Should he try? As

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he watched her and wondered, still chatting easily, the contrast between his expression and hers was peculiar.

If her face was reticent, his was too explanatory. One knew all about him almost at the first glance; he was a handsome, unoccupied man, who had never lacked money, and had spent it chiefly on pleasure, and at one and thirty was already rather tired of it.

Love, he assured himself, had never touched the girl opposite him with the tip of his finger; he, on the other hand, had been (more than once) severely singed and scorched by a too heedless and imprudent handling of that god's torch.

"Won't you read my brother's note?" he asked. "Perhaps he may expect me to bring him back an answer."

She laid aside her knitting—a grey worsted stocking for a poor man—Bertram thought a coloured silk tie for a gentleman would have been more suitable work for her slim and beautiful fingers—and bent a little forward to read the elder Mr. Brandon's letter.

They were only half-brothers, and Bertram was fifteen years younger than his brother, who seemed much older yet, being a recluse and a valetudinarian.

"You will, I suppose, be surprised," said the letter, "at what I am writing, although I have ineffectually tried for months to let you see it was coming. Perhaps also you will think it odd that I should write when almost daily opportunities offer of speaking and explaining myself. But if I spoke you would be sure to answer at once, and that would probably be bad for my wishes. I write and beg you not to reply right off, but to take a day or two to consider it. In fact, you will have to do so, for I shall go away for a week, and this letter I will leave behind to be taken to you.

"Of course I am many years older than you, and seem quite an old man, being an invalid and a bookish solitary. But in some way you are not like a girl, and enough of our tastes are similar for us to get on well. Especially we both like books, and country walks, natural history, and a very quiet life. And we both like the poor people, and doing what we can for them. Unfortunately, I am not clever at seeing how best to be of real use to them,

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and you, who do see, are not so well off as I am. Think it all over.

"I know you hate change, and so do I. But if you married me it would only mean moving about a quarter of a mile, and then you would never have to put up with any change at all, all the rest of your life."

The writer appeared to think this argument of such weight as to be unwilling to weaken it by any addition, and therewith concluded his somewhat peculiar proposal of marriage.

In face of the elder Mr. Brandon's letter the girl was at first helpless; she could not perceive a duty sticking out anywhere, and it did not occur to her to listen to her own feelings for guidance. She never so much as asked herself whether she could love him (even she must have known that she did not love him already), or even whether, without that, she could be happy with him as his wife.

Esther merely debated with herself so as to the probable degree of her usefulness to this elderly invalid, and tried to weigh it against her certain usefulness where she was. Were she to marry him there need be little fear as to the worthy filling of her present post, competent village school-mistresses being abundant. But, absolute recluse as he was, in a neighbourhood where even the most sociable had few chances of meeting social equals, Esther perceived that Mr. Philip Brandon, if refused by her, would be unlikely to meet another lady to whom his offer might be repeated.

IV

Fortunately, as I think, Esther had no idea how lonely her somewhat superannuated lover was, or how much he was in earnest in his offer. It did not read passionately, and he had been at pains to draw no pathetic picture of alternative loneliness to scare the girl into accepting him. In truth, loneliness was his only real disease, and it had aged him before his time; all his life he had been a hopeless sufferer from it. He had never had friends, he who had always been starving for friendship; he had been shut up in his reluctant isolation as imperviously as the enchanted prince about whose sleeping palace the

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thorns rose higher, and the briar wove its ever-spreading thicket. And now it seemed to him that a girl's voice was calling through the thickening wood; if only she would come to him!

What a contrast were the half-brothers! Bertram might almost be said never to have been alone in his life. He had almost had too many friends; there had been no inside to his life, no quietness; he had never once paused to look back, scarcely even forward; there had been no undertone: he had lived always out loud, in the shadowless, perspectiveless present. If Esther had allowed the habit of duty so to grow upon her that her life had become a mere monotone, the younger Brandon's had all the flat dazzle of a kaleidoscope; many-coloured, restless, changeful, but unmeaning. It had never occurred to him to inquire of himself where duty was; and the result in his own case at one and thirty, and his brother's at six and forty, was oddly similar. He wanted some one to seize the tiller for him, and steer a definite course to some determined anchorage.

Philip Brandon remained away a fortnight; at the end of his allotted week he was too cowardly to come back and read the refusal he felt certain of. And, during his absence, Esther and his brother met almost daily.

The night before Philip's return they were again sitting in the firelight, she knitting, and Bertram doing, as before, most of the talking.

"I think," he observed, "that you and I might balance one another to our mutual advantage."

She looked up interrogatively.

"Well, if our dispositions and characters could be mixed up, perhaps they would be improved. You have never kept any part of your life for yourself. I have never given any of mine to any one else."

"You mean that you are selfish?" He nodded. "Well, so am I. You are quite wrong in saying that I have kept none of my life for myself. No one else has ever shared it at all."

"Oh, I know that. It has been your mistake. You have lived in your own individuality as in a convent—I mean that your time, your occupations, have always been spent for others. You have never done anything

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entirely for your own sake, just because you liked to do it."

"I fancy I have done everything for that reason."

"I am not trying to flatter, mind you," he went on, "for I do not mean this as unmitigated praise. You *ought* to have kept a life-interest in yourself. And, after all, with all your monotonous devotion to others, you have missed the principal point."

She did not at once ask him what, in his opinion, the principal point was. She was thinking of his phrases. That her life-long spending of herself in exterior devotion to others was flatly monotonous she began to surmise was true. That she had somehow, with it all, missed the point, of that, too, a chill misgiving had begun to arise.

"Martha has been your patron saint," he said, "and you have imitated her mistake."

"Much serving?"

Again he nodded.

"I always thought her rather ill-treated," observed Esther.

"She fussed," he replied briefly. "Love is the one thing needful, for which fussy officious service is but a linsey-wolsey equivalent." He paused a moment, and surprised her by adding, "Love was the only thing He needed, or ever does need—at their hands, at ours. After all, what could Martha do for Him? It was because her sister knew that He was above all such needs of human service, that she stayed close to Him and listened."

Esther, perhaps only half comprehending, and certainly only half convinced, made no comment, except by a slight gesture that was partly a protest.

"Martha fussed, Mary loved," he went on. "Mary understood. Martha only meant well. She was a laborious, ineffectual, very honest, self-sacrificing female, with a chronic habit of immolating her natural inclinations on all manner of uncalled-for altars. *She* sacrificed her ease; Mary gave herself."

He still watched her as she knitted; but he flattered himself she was less indifferent to his presence, less inattentive to his remarks. And in her face he already fancied that he perceived a glimmer of dawn.

He was determined that the fire-lamp should be lighted.

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His tone deepened, and, as much to his own astonishment as hers, he said—

"You have never given more than blank service. You have been so 'cumbered' with it that you never had leisure to notice you had given no love."

Suddenly her fine face was suffused with a brilliant flush that was no reflection of the fire-glow. It was true; he was holding out to her the missing clue, the thing that had been lacking in her life.

"You have never loved," he persisted, in a lower voice, but, as it were, pitilessly; "only served. Man you have never pretended to love—never recognized that it was expected of you. God you *have* made some show of loving; but it was mere chill service. If you had loved Him, He would have taught you to love us also."

It was almost an indictment, and they both felt it so. She made no plea of guilty or not guilty.

"Now look!" he continued. "*I*—yes, I—intend to teach you the one lesson you have been stupid at. The one that supremely matters. It will take time, but I have all mine to spare. And this game is worth the candle. Most people try and seize the desired object unawares. *I* give warning. I intend to work hard to make you care for me, to force you to love me; you can be as much on your guard as you choose. But I shall succeed, and you will thank me."

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THE FELLOW-TRAVELLER

I

"HERE I am at last," gasped the lady, much out of breath, as she subsided untidily into the corner seat opposite to her husband, while the train began to move. "Here I am, you see, with all my imperfections on my head."

"Not all," said her husband, letting a cold eye of impartial criticism drop from her outrageous hat to her crumpled, not immaculate, blouse.

"Your shoe-string," he added, as his glance fell to her feet, "is untied. I wonder it didn't trip you." One could not gather from his tone that he would have cared much if it had.

He was evidently her husband.

It could even now be seen that he had been better born than his wife, and better bred. But something had lowered him, perhaps his marriage: and what signs of birth and breeding clave to him still, hung about him not precisely as a benediction. If the deterioration had reached a complete, unconscious stage, he might have been less discontented.

Of good manners he had apparently little left to trouble him. His wife had arrived almost as the train was moving, but he had not risen from his place, or even helped her as she clambered up into the carriage, much encumbered by parcels and by the length of her skirt: though he was able to note that it was too long for a travelling dress, was slightly torn at the bottom, and had been put on crooked. He had not only perceived that her shoelace was untied, but also that her shoes had not been cleaned since she had worn them yesterday.

Their fellow-traveller did not seem to watch them, nor to be listening to what they said; but he had heard,

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and he noted everything with some inward attention and interest. His fellow-creatures mostly interested him.

He could see that the lady had been pretty, and might be pretty still if she would be less untidy; and that the gentleman would certainly be good-looking were his features animated by a pleasanter expression. Neither husband nor wife, he decided, was stupid, though the latter might be somewhat silly. It was obviously silly of her to have her fine hair so ill-dressed that it looked scarcely clean, and to wear garments that even smartness would not have made suitable, and were, in fact, the reverse of smart. Her hat, in its best days, might have done for a garden-party, though its best days could never have been very good, and had evidently been unduly brief. It was not possible to suppose that she actually went to bed in it; but if she had it would have looked just as it did.

Her hands were neither large nor ugly, but gloves a size too small, and badly burst, would not have improved them, even if the gloves had been clean. When her husband had demurred to all her imperfections being gathered on her head, she had laughed, as if cheerfully amused by the hard-hearted repartee. Ill-temper, anyway, was not among her imperfections. The fellow-traveller was not so sure of her husband. If his temper was good, he kept it to himself. But that might be no more then perversity. The fellow-traveller was not quite willing to take him at his word. Some sweet things are apt to ferment in heat, and others turn a little acid in digestion.

The gentleman, after his brief remark, became once more absorbed in his paper, which was a weekly review; the lady found sufficient occupation for a time in recovering her breath and endeavouring to grow cool.

"I thought," her husband remarked presently, without looking up, or seeming to interrupt his reading, "that sitting with your back to the engine made you sick."

"So it does," his wife replied, with all her former cheerfulness; "but I haven't had time to think of it."

"Pray do not hurry," said the young man. "The journey is long."

"Besides," explained the lady, fanning herself warmly

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with a handkerchief too lacy to be often washed. "I like to look out of the window."

Her husband did not offer to exchange seats, but relapsed into his review more completely.

Here, certainly, was an opportunity for the fellow-traveller. He occupied the other corner-place facing the engine, where, no doubt, the lady would have had more air, and might have postponed any idea of being sick for that journey altogether. He would readily have given up his seat, but to offer it, he feared, might suggest too plainly the omission of which the lady's husband was guilty. So the opportunity was let slip.

"One often," thought the fellow-traveller, "is restrained from a small benevolence by the fear of some smaller discourtesy. If he *had* felt snubbed, the fellow would have deserved it. And yet," he added, with a later scruple, "he may but have wished by his carelessness to advertise the respectability of their union."

As a matter of fact, their conjugality needed no advertisement. The untidy lady was obviously respectable, and her husband was as perfectly respectable as his threadbare self-respect would let him be. It was all in tatters, from irritable thorns, but the bits were still there.

"A silly fellow," thought the fellow-traveller, "to marry beneath him, and be cross with his wife for not being quite his equal."

But then, the fellow-traveller never had married beneath him, as he immediately reminded himself. Other folks' tight boots do not pinch our own toes.

The lady, when cool enough to stop fanning herself, dropped the handkerchief without seeming to notice it, and as her husband did not pick it up, the fellow-traveller was willing to suppose he had not noticed it either. Here, perhaps, was another opportunity, but again the fellow-traveller let it go. Though not reserved, he was unready at putting himself forward.

The lady became interested in her parcels, some of which, like Mr. Weller's knowledge of London, were extensive and peculiar. The largest she endeavoured to poise on the top of her husband's now battered portmanteau (it had been expensive once), but the motion of the train sent it bounding down upon the gentleman's

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head. He emitted no sign of impatience, but maintained an air of total unconsciousness of the circumstance, and the parcel ricochetted on to the floor, where it seemed inevitable that the lady must presently step back upon it, when she should have finished standing up on the seat opposite to arrange her other parcels in the rack. Her husband was apparently quite imperturbed by the imminence of such a catastrophe; perhaps he knew that the cardboard box contained nothing likely to be damaged. On the contrary, the fellow-traveller had no such fortifying knowledge, and he awaited with apprehension the crunch which must ensue when the lady's considerable weight should descend. But it descended sideways; for while both her hands were busy among her parcels, the train lurched, and she came down, with undiminished good temper, and no hurt, but with as little grace.

"I hope," the fellow-traveller felt unable to abstain from saying, "that you are not hurt."

"Not a bit. And though I involved three parcels in my fall, they're not hurt either."

"I suppose," observed her husband, "you could not conveniently sit still. Had you fallen out of the window, we should have been alarmed."

The lady laughed.

"So should I," she declared. "I *am* glad Gyp's box of soldiers did not fall under me."

She proceeded to assure herself of their preservation from injury by undoing the packet and displaying its contents to her husband.

"Look what fat ones," she begged. "Cavalry. Men and horses in two pieces. Not those common flat things that you must look at always from one side to believe in. Gyp will love them."

II

"Oh, he's asleep," she assured her husband not long afterwards. "We embarrassed him, and he thought it best. But though he did it on purpose, he really is asleep. Nobody *pretends* to go to sleep with their mouth open."

The young man glanced without curiosity at the fellow-traveller, who certainly presented the phenomena indicated.

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"And," she added, "*I* shouldn't mind if he was awake. He's a dear. A priest. He'd be saying his office if he wasn't too shy. He has the little book there; it must be lumpy to sit on. But he didn't think we looked pious, and didn't want to seem so."

Her husband smiled; for all the world he would not have smiled and looked pleasant while the fellow-traveller could have seen and approved.

"You seem to know all about him."

"Oh, well, I'm a Catholic—of sorts. Not A 1, or I should not have married you in a registry office, and without a bridesmaid or a dispensation. But I know my clergy when I see it; and he's a good sort. He wanted to offer me his corner when you reminded me that I usually make a point of being sick with my back to the engine. But he was too well bred."

"Too well bred!"

"Yes."

And she wagged her head vigorously, so that the monstrous flowers and feathers fluttered in the breeze.

"Much too well bred. It isn't *best* manners to show up other people; and he knew that you ought to have offered me *your* place. So he sat tight; and it took him all his time."

The young man looked much handsomer as he smiled again.

(I hope the fellow-traveller may be forgiven for noting it, in spite of his open mouth and really dramatic slumber.)

"Gyp," he expostulated, "you always say you will *ask* for what you want. Small Gyp does, and we wait for it."

"Suttinly. I had the not least intention of being sick. I should have warned you. And I didn't care twopence where I sat. You know I never sit still anywhere long; but *he* didn't, and he wanted to offer me his place. Aren't they fat soldiers?"

"Yes. How much did they cost?"

"A lot. And I've a present for you as well. A book; and one for myself, lest you and Gyp should feel awkward; a new veil with spots as big as sixpence. I couldn't see round the edge of the one in front of my left eye while I tried it on."

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"And you never said you wanted any money!"

"No. They were to be *presents*. So I popped that ring you said was vulgar—with 'Regard' in a ruby, and emerald, a garnet, an amethyst, another ruby, and a diamond. I got seventeen shillings and sixpence for it; and pretended I should want it out again on Saturday; or else he would only have given me fourteen shillings on it."

"You *pawned* it!"

"Yes. All for love. I saw those fat soldiers; and I knew you disliked the ring. And the book is about your regiment. That's why I nearly missed the train. And you said my imperfections were all over me."

This was hardly just, for he had only denied that they were confined to her head; but conscious, perhaps, that bare justice would not do much for him, he did not protest at getting something less.

From the moment Gyp's name had been mentioned, his manner had been less aloof and uninterested.

"It's funny," said his wife presently, "that she is so keen about soldiers. She ought to want dolls, but she doesn't. Nor do I. I wanted soldiers—and I got one."

Had the brim of her hat been less, she would, he thought, have kissed him there and then—and, after all, the fellow-traveller might awake at any moment. Even the broadest brim may have unforeseen uses.

The young man glanced with hurried apprehension at the fellow-traveller, who emitted a stertorous snore that gave ample satisfaction. He was not a disingenuous person, but only embarrassed by his situation, as involuntary third leg of the easel. He did his best by turning still further away, so that even were his eyes wide open they would have seen nothing but the opulent English landscape, fat fields, and browsing kine, twisting brook and cool spinney where doves crooned their indolent love-lyrics.

"Yes," said the lady. "I got my soldier."

And she sighed.

The gentleman did not sigh; but perhaps he thought he might have. She understood as well as if he had sighed like the night wind.

"You wouldn't do it again," she said, twisting her

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gloves into a ball and kneading them together in the palm of her left hand; a little blush was plainly perceptible on a cheek that was now, in general, pale.

Her speech annoyed him. When had he complained?

"Would *you?*" he asked.

"God forbid—if I knew what I do know now. But one knows afterwards."

Did she mean his temper? He too flushed, but somewhat angrily, whereas her little blush had no anger in it, only a shy self-shame.

"I was too glad to get my soldier then," she said, "to foresee that I should spoil him."

Her eyes were not meeting his, but held determinedly to the ugly little ball of shabby gloves she was kneading.

So far he only felt that she was reproaching him, and reproach seldom softens. His face looked hard enough, and his silence made a hard atmosphere that she could feel.

She was sure he was thinking of the misfortune of his marriage—though, truly, it was she who was reminding him of it. Otherwise she might have said no more.

As it was, she said her say.

"I know that you had to leave the regiment because *I* was banned; though you were so decent as to pretend it was because you couldn't stick the colonel, and had no chance of promotion under him. If that had been true, you would have exchanged into another regiment; but you knew no regiment would stand me."

He did not deny what could not be denied; only he wished to heaven she would let these truths lie in their dismal graves.

"Well," he said, gruffly perhaps, "you didn't marry the regiment, but me. You'll have to make the best of it."

"The worst of it would do for *me*," she said. Then she did look up.

"What you never have seen," she went on, "is that my misfortune is greater than yours."

He really wanted no balancing of misfortunes, and was irritated that she would balance them. But, in fact, he did not see what her share was.

"Since you choose to say so," he said, "I will admit

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I do not appreciate what you call your misfortune. You married me and you've got me. I am poorer than when we met, but I know no one cares less for money than you do."

"I do not care at all. If you hadn't any, I shouldn't mind—for my sake. But I must mind for yours."

"Please don't till I tell you that *I* mind."

"I can't wait for that. But I was not thinking of money. Can't you see it is worse to injure than to be injured?"

He moved impatiently. He did believe their marriage had injured him—as such a marriage always must injure such a man. She knew his thought so well that, now the impulse was on her, she would say all!

"You have never taken into count," she said, "what *I* gave up."

In truth, he had not; even now he could not see.

"Conscience," she said, with lips and tongue so dry she could scarcely make them serve her; so that in the effort she spoke the louder. "The sight of that old priest reminds me. Because you wouldn't marry me in a church of ours, or promise what must be promised to be married there, I married you, without any priest, in a registry office, and Gyp is not mine to teach what I believed, and believe still, though I played the fool with my faith. You think my father and mother leave me alone because they are too conscious of their inferiority to thrust themselves on our notice. They will have nothing to do with us because they think I have disgraced them. Poor Mr. and Mrs. Tim O'Flaherty are not at all lifted up by the memory of the Honourable Mrs. Furnival, their daughter, but would be glad enough to think of her if she was Mrs. O'Flynn of the shop, or Mrs. Flannigan of the farm."

The young man's flush had not died away, but it was, oddly enough, perhaps, no longer angry. He did not like his wife less for being honest; with all his own faults, he was honest too.

"Gyp, I beg your pardon," he said simply, and his voice made her look up again; she had been, for all her vehemence, half afraid.

At that moment came the crash. The fields were as

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rich outside as ever, the summer afternoon as full of indolent warm peace. The meadow lifted itself to a little hill, topped by a small farmhouse, with low, red-brown roof, lichen-rusted; behind it, along the ridge, ran a belt of larch and stone pines; in front was a walled garden, outside of which, on the steps of the gateway, stood the farm-wife, feeding poultry. She heard the noise as the engine left the rails and tore on for twenty yards along the permanent way, heard the shrill screams of the whistle, and saw the engine go over the high embankment, dragging three carriages with it; the couplings between the last of the three and the fourth carriage broke, and the rest of the train remained on the line, though that fourth carriage was overturned, and every one in the train felt the violence of the shock.

Those in the fore part of the train were almost all of them injured, though some much less seriously than might have been expected. The total number of passengers was not great, and none of those in the hinder part of the train came by worse mishaps than severe shaking, or cuts from broken glass.

The engine-driver was killed, and the stoker died within half an hour, and two passengers were dead before him. "A priest, and the wife of the Honourable George Furnival"; in the first newspaper accounts the name of the priest did not transpire. But the newspapers were able to inform a thankful public that "almost miraculously, the Honourable G. Furnival (second son of Lord Holborn), though travelling in the same coach, escaped with slight contusions." At the bottom of the embankment, in a field yellow with buttercups, lay the shattered, twisted ruins of the three carriages, out of which it was not easy to extricate those who could not extricate themselves. But it was done wonderfully quickly; several were very badly hurt, and took many days to recover. Some who were only stunned seemed dead at first. No one thought "Gyp" or the priest was dead; they were conscious, and could speak, but no one could believe, if hope, that they would live. Furnival helped those who got the priest and his wife out of the ruined carriage, and the priest heard his voice. He could not see.

"Is your wife hurt?" he asked, for the young man's

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voice sounded close to him; and Furnival bent low down and told him.

"She is a Catholic," he said. "Could you do anything for her?"

"Yes; if you will let me."

The dying woman and the dying priest were laid close together, on the slope of the embankment; and Furnival drew the little group of helpers away. Indeed, they went off to help elsewhere. He stood near, a dozen paces off, watching them as if he saw it in a picture. It scarcely seemed so real as a picture; more like a badly dreamed dream. From a village, half hidden behind trees, quarter of a mile away, folk were streaming across the pleasant fields to help. With easy deliberation the church bells began to tell the hour of six, and then to chime—

"All people that on earth do dwell."

To the left there was a reach of shallow river, bordered on one side by alder-brake, and a kingfisher flashed along it. A waterhen called, and then a cock-pheasant crowed, not lover-wise, but conjugally to his mate; his chicks and hers were weeks old, and they felt like an elderly couple.

"I cannot see you. Are you near?" the priest asked in a gentle voice that hid all his own torture.

"Yes, quite close. . . ." And the dying woman made her confession, very briefly, in quick, short gasps.

Then the dying priest gave absolution, and bade her call her husband back.

Her husband in a moment was kneeling by her side.

"I've done my part . . ." said the fellow-traveller. "Thank God there was time. . . . Will you?"

Furnival could not understand.

"Can you say," he almost whispered, "just one word more. I will do it—whatever you ask."

"Promise her little Gyp . . ." begged the priest.

The other Gyp's husband turned to her.

"I promise you little Gyp," he said. "She shall be yours—brought up in your faith."

"Thank you, Doodles . . . give her . . ."

He bent down low to listen.

". . . the fat soldiers."

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26, RUE DU CARROUSEL

I

JEAN LOUIS GABRIEL BOURGADE was from Gascony, and they say in our country that the Gascons are liars, but I do happen to know that what Bourgade says about the empty house in the Rue du Carrousel was the simple truth.

He was the last man in the world to be the subject of anything like a preternatural experience, being, if anything fat, and rather materialistic in appearance. Nevertheless, an episode centred round him that could scarcely be outdone for romance and weirdness.

As he tells the story this is what really happened, though the papers have exaggerated and suppressed details, so as to alter this tale considerably.

It was not dark, for one thing, when he met the girl on the bridge near the Morgue, but growing dusk, and a chilly bitter wind was stirring up the little heaps of dust and refuse that get drifted into the corners of the bridge. A fragment of gravel had thus got blown into one of his eyes, and Jean Louis stood still a moment to rub it out with his handkerchief.

It was a dismal, chilly afternoon, the day after the Jour des Morts—that is, the third of November—and the sky threatened snow; there had been no sun all day, nor the day before either, and the wind had come in shivering gusts out of the east.

People did not loiter in the streets, but hurried along, and Jean Louis had only stood still to be the better able to get the bit of sharp gravel out of his eye.

As he so stood, thinking of nothing on earth but a morsel of intrusive grit that was annoying him, he exclaimed aloud—

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"Rue du Carrousel, numéro vingt-six."

Now, why?

I suppose no one will ever be able to answer that question. Some say he must have just seen the address on an *affiche*, and it rose to his lips mechanically while his attention was distracted by the bit of gravel in his eye. But at best that is only an assertion, and no explanation whatever. What we want is an explanation. And besides, he declares that he had seen no such *affiche*. What could such an *affiche* be about? There was absolutely nothing to advertise at the address, and it was not *affichée* as being to let; for, as we now know, the house was condemned, and had been for some time. In fact, its demolition was already in progress.

No, I do not believe any one will explain away that extraordinary exclamation with its fateful and incredible results.

It was a telepathetic episode; and the words that articulated themselves on Bourgade's lips were no mechanical reproduction of a half-forgotten inscription seen somewhere by unheeding eyes.

"Rue du Carrousel, numéro vingt-six," said Bourgade, as he stood on the bridge that windy afternoon, struggling with his gritty annoyance.

"Pardon. Did monsieur speak?"

Jean Louis had the bit of grit safe on his handkerchief, and rubbing his eye once more to be sure it was free from trespass now, he looked to see who had addressed him.

"Mademoiselle," he replied, lifting his hat respectfully, "it is true that I spoke. But wherefore I cannot tell. I think I mentioned an address; certainly not one I know anything about."

The young man bowed silently, and passed on; and eighty seconds later passed in by the right-hand entrance to the Morgue.

She was walking quickly, and had been in the act of passing Bourgade when he had made his inexplicable observation.

He walked on in the same direction, but rather slower.

And his mind was chiefly occupied with conjecture as to the Rue du Carrousel, 26. Also he thought a little about the girl who had overheard him.

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He followed her into the Morgue, and found her gazing with swift eagerness at the glass, behind which were propped, in their grim, half-reclining attitude, three dead bodies.

In a moment one takes in the whole detail of that place. One passes out, in less than a minute perhaps, into the busy street of the great, wicked, light-hearted city; but the scene within, simple enough as it is, is photographed permanently on the recollection.

There were there that afternoon three men. One past middle age, bloated, degraded, earthly, sensual, fiendish. One was perhaps thirty-seven, but aged before his time by vice, and even crime; a villainous impress of sordid, hateful purposes stamped for ever on the desecrated face. But the third was young, and though not handsome, had a countenance with no worse inscription than dire and chill despair. The deep waters of ruin had gone in even over his soul.

The girl looked at each of them with some repugnance, and with a hurried compassion, but without personal interest or curiosity. They were not what she sought, and she had come to seek, not out of morbid curiosity.

She turned away and left the low, grim building by what was now her right. It would have been hard to tell what was expressed in her look and gesture. Perhaps relief. She had not come thither in hope to find, but in dread of finding.

"It is not an enemy she seeks," thought Bourgade to himself.

In the few moments she had stood looking in through the glass at those dead men, Bourgade had watched her.

She was quite young, not more probably than twenty, or twenty-one. But her face was grave, and had a certain dignity. Yet she was of the people, and not (Bourgade determined) of Paris.

She looked like a Norman, or the daughter of a farmer of Picardy. Her dress was very neat, and not poor, but quiet, and without attempt at fashion.

She was not tall or sturdy, but she was almost beautiful. Bourgade followed the girl simply because he had been going in the same direction. He had no idea of overtaking or even watching her. And his mind was more occupied

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now by the recollection of his unexplained allusion in speech to the house in the Rue du Carrousel, than by the thought of the girl who had overheard it.

Presently she crossed the street, where it turns to the left towards Notre Dame; and, as every one knows, it is very wide there. Suddenly, halfway across she stood still as if in doubt. And he wondered to himself whether she was conscious of her own stupidity in thus standing still in the midst of a busy crossing.

She now looked round and caught the eye of a passing *fiacre* driver that was going back at a footpace to the cab-stand. The man drew up, and she got into the carriage.

"Rue du Carrousel, vingt-six," he heard her say to the *cocher*.

II

Half a minute later, Bourgade had also made up his mind to go and see what there was at No. 26 in the narrow street on the left bank of the Seine, from which one could get a glimpse of the Place du Carrousel, on the other side of the river, to which the place owed its name.

But Bourgade walked a few hundred yards, and got into a *fiacre* at the cab-stand. And when he got in, he said only "Rue du Carrousel," indicating no number, and deciding in his mind to get out at the entrance of the street and walk up.

As he had no business at the house, he shrank from the *bêtise* of being driven right up to it only to come away again. It is a dirty little street, and void of anything to interest or attract. There are many shops, but all squalid and repulsive; where faded, ill-odorous vegetables, or frowsy, ragged, second-hand clothing can be bought.

And No. 26 did not strike the beholder any more favourably than the rest. But it had a distinction; it was empty, while the other houses in the street were for the most part crammed to overflowing. The front was plastered with torn and weather-draggled posters, advertising cures, and soaps and condiments. The windows were boarded up—that is, in the lower storeys; upstairs they were curtained with impenetrable grime and filth.

There are hundreds of such dismal, empty houses,

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falling into squalid ruin, in every big city in Europe. It had no special feature, no suggestion of tragedy or romance; only of ruin and decay.

It was not a street in which one could stand still and stare for any length of time at anything, though it were only an empty house. And, indeed, there was nothing to see. So Bourgade turned round, and began retracing his steps. Not till he had reached the bottom of the street did it occur to him to wonder why he had not seen anything more of the girl who had also taken a *fiacre* from the Rue du Carrousel. And then he was not long in deciding that she had found as little to detain her there as he had, and had probably driven away in the same carriage that had brought her.

That night Bourgade was summoned to Rheims on business connected with the firm, and he did not get back to Paris till the sixth of November, Friday night.

But the very night of his return the young woman from Picardy—as he called her in his mind—and the episode of the Rue du Carrousel were brought up again, and in a way the least expected.

Bourgade was smoking his cigarette after dining at the Café Faure in the Place Madame Roland, when the door nearest him opened and in walked Bastien Gargot, the detective.

They had been schoolfellows, and had always since been very good friends when they met, though that had latterly not been often. Bastien was a very different man—eager, imaginative, impulsive, full of theory and romance—the last man in the world you might say to be a detective, and yet in his own line one of the very foremost and most successful. He at once caught sight of Bourgade, and came to sit down beside him.

"Well, and what strange things befell you at Rheims?" he inquired, when Bourgade had told his friend of his recent absence in the provinces.

"Nothing. But, ah, yes. I will tell you, Bastien, of a droll circumstance here in Paris the day I went away. Tuesday afternoon it was."

And he told the episode of the Rue du Carrousel.

He had by no means calculated on its effect. Bastien was out of himself, and would be neither silent nor calm

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till they were both in the street again on the way to the dirty street on the left side of the Seine.

By the time they stood opposite the empty house, Bourgade had been made to repeat his story half a dozen times; but the more he heard it the more Bastien seemed to think of it.

"I shall make my name over this," he cried more than once. "I have a certainty that it will be so." And the event proved him right.

"The first thing," he said, "is to enter the house." And that was a matter of time. It necessitated a journey to the other end of Paris. And it was nearly midnight by the time Bourgade and Gargot stood inside the filthy, echoing stone entrance-hall of the condemned and half-ruinous house.

Bourgade was not an impressionable fellow, but the empty house, the weird and mysterious hour, and the strange reason of their presence combined to create a sensation of the unwonted and the preternatural. Gargot was tremulous with tension and excitement.

The rooms were as empty as they were filthy, all except the last they entered—a dismal attic looking to the back. And there they found the dead body of a girl.

At first Bourgade believed it was that of the girl who had overheard his remark about the Rue du Carrousel, and he turned chill with horror. It seemed as though that empty word of his had sent the girl hither to her death.

But he soon was relieved of that horror, at all events. For this woman was older by three or four years, and very much handsomer, though with less of the inward beauty of the soul showing outwards on her face. And this woman was dressed in rich and fashionable garments. On her fingers were several rings, and she wore trinkets. Still, in spite of all differences, Bourgade was certain that such a likeness as there was here could only mean that the dead woman and the girl he had seen alive were sisters.

The body was laid on the floor, with not so much as a cloth thrown over it; there was absolutely no attempt at concealment. Nor did the attic show the slightest trace of any struggle, or suggest any clue to the manner of the woman's death.

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"She was not murdered here," murmured Bastien. "The body has been brought here merely to be out of sight; and that only for a time. She has not been dead long."

"How long, do you think?" whispered Bourgade. There certainly seemed no fear of their being overheard, but instinctively he sank his voice to a stealthy whisper that matched the secret and tragic surroundings.

"My belief is that she was murdered at about four o'clock on Tuesday afternoon."

"Can you tell that from the body?"

Gargot shook his head.

"I remember only that that was the hour of your exclamation, and of your *rencontre* with the girl whom you now say you believe to have been this woman's sister."

The men stood looking down by the curtained light of their bull's-eye lantern at the dead form, with its upturned, haggard face. It was not a good face—worldly, dissipated, sensual, for all its great beauty.

"I am sure they were, as you say, sisters," said Bastien; "and the younger one had come to Paris to seek out and rescue this one. Perhaps she had only lately traced her to Paris. Perhaps this one had even written to her at last, stricken with a passing remorse. Or, more likely, pressed by a sudden grim foreboding."

He went to the window and looked out through its filthy, dust-curtained panes. There was a moon, and it shone coldly down over the great city.

Bourgade went softly across the creaking floor, and stood beside his friend, and also gazed out into the chill night.

At the back of the house in which they were was a small courtyard, and, separated from this by a very high wall, was a large garden, full of tall trees; behind the trees loomed the outline of a large house.

"That is the back of the Rue St. Antoine," mused Bastien, and he drew from his pocket a small Paris Guide. He stooped down, and, almost kneeling on the dirty floor, while Bourgade turned the bull's-eye of the lantern on the page, the detective examined first a small section map, then a street directory.

"Yes, Bourgade, my friend," he said presently; "there will be big names in this affair. That garden is

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at the back of the Hôtel Marseilles, the family mansion of Monseigneur His Excellency the Duc de Marseilles. Come downstairs with me."

Gingerly enough they picked their way down the dirty stone staircase that had once been so magnificent, and still showed squalid signs of its long-vanished splendours. Passing out at the back, Gargot led the way to the wall, as high as a convent wall, dividing this mean courtyard from the garden of the great noble's palace.

"As I expected, Bourgade; there is, you see, a door," said Bastien, with a sort of terrible, grave satisfaction.

He examined it very carefully, and yet swiftly enough.

"There is a lock," he said, "but it is broken. The door is entirely fastened by bolts, and they are all on the other side. Yet the door has been opened lately."

He had been very cautiously, but with a matchless keenness, sweeping the light of the lantern round the doorway.

"See!" he whispered.

On a rusty nail in the wall, close to the door, was a tiny shred of fringe—fringe such as ladies wear upon their dress, fringe precisely similar to some upon the dead woman's dress upstairs.

"Come back," said Bastien; "we must go upstairs again."

For this, to say the truth, Bourgade was not very eager. There lay such a horror on those hollow-sounding stairs and empty rooms and corridors that he hated to submit himself again to its influence. Still, he was preparing, all unwilling, to obey, when his friend touched him on the arm, and putting his mouth close to his ear, whispered—

"Listen!"

At first there was no sound, then Bourgade heard from the other side of the prison-like wall a sound he hardly recognized.

"What is it, then?" he whispered.

"Digging. Her grave is being made. Wait; we shall see presently her funeral."

Bourgade shuddered. The naked tree-tops swayed and clutched at the night sky. A sobbing wind went in gusts around the chimney-stacks, and there, fifty yards away, perhaps, was a murderer digging a grave.

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It seemed to Bourgade that the digging would never cease. It seemed to him that they waited hours for it to have done. And all the time shudders ran through his fat body as he thought of it.

It did at last cease, and after a very few moments a light, quick step was heard on the other side of the gate in the wall. Bourgade shrank up closer to Gargot, in the black shadow of the wall, not a dozen paces from where the murderer would so soon stand.

"I cannot bear to see him!" he whispered.

"You will not see *him*," whispered Gargot, grimly.

Very noiselessly the bolts were drawn, and very stealthily, though without delay, the door was opened. Into the courtyard from the garden stepped the grave-digger.

Bourgade had trembled to see him. And yet he could not but look, and that with devouring curiosity. In the middle of the yard was one brilliant patch of silvery moonlight, which any one going to the house must cross. On that Bourgade fixed his eyes; and in a few seconds they were filled by a sight that filled them with utter astonishment.

Just as the grave-digger reached the patch of light, a slight sound in the garden, that proved to be nothing but some wind-blown leaves, caused the hurrying feet to pause an instant, caused the face to be turned. In the moonlight stood a lady, tall, active, vigorous, but old, and with haughty, aristocratic, grandly beautiful features.

Gargot smiled grimly. Bourgade whispered—

"But it is a woman! A lady!"

Gargot nodded, and on her way into the house hurried madame, her Excellency the Duchesse de Marseilles, daughter of the Prince de Garonne, and sister to the Grand Duchess of Hochheim-Braumberg.

"Listen," Gargot whispered into Bourgade's tingling ear. "I knew it would be a woman. That garden is the garden of the Hôtel Marseilles, and it belongs to the Duc de Marseilles. But he lives chiefly in a furnished apartment in the Boulevard Haussman. He is young, and silly, and very rich, and weak rather than wicked. Every one knows that his mother is a proud and cruel old woman; ambition is all in all to her. And she is

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set on his marrying her niece, the Princess Barbara of Hochhein-Braumberg; whereas marriage is not his idea at all. That is the gossip of the clubs. Bourgade, that dead woman upstairs, for all her flaunting finery, wears a wedding ring. Perhaps she also might some day, if she had lived, have claimed the title of Duchess of Marseilles. If she had lived! But the other duchess saw to that. The duke has been for ten days at Barbasson with his regiment. His mother got the girl to visit her at the Hôtel de Marseilles. There she killed her. She brought her here, for this empty house also belongs to them, and left the body here till its grave should be ready. This is Friday. On Tuesday night it snowed, and there was a hard frost. She could do no digging. On Wednesday it was still impossible. Last night she began her work; to-night she has finished it."

The duchess had come back. But this time, bearing her heavy burden, she went slowly, and she did not venture to cross the moonlit patch in the centre of the yard, but skirted it. At the door she rested a moment or two, then continued her way, leaving the door for the time unbarred. Bastien noisclessly slipped after her. Bourgade stayed in their lurking place under the shadow of the wall.

In about ten minutes Gargot returned.

"She is shovelling in the earth. Dieu! she's cool. Now we can go. She will be back presently to bolt the door."

In silence they made their way back into the house, and thence into the deserted street. As they paced down towards the Seine their footfalls echoed loudly.

"The papers yesterday announced that Madame la Duchesse de Marseilles had left Paris *en route* for Hochheimstal. She will leave to-morrow by the Cologne train at six a.m. Ah, by the way, it is to-day. In five hours she will have gone. We shall have to empty that grave again. The body shall be exposed in the Morgue. Your friend will claim it. Ah, Madame la Duchesse, you are a daring woman, but I am sorry for you," declared Gargot. But his sorrow did not strike Bourgade as being very deep.

They went on their way. And just as Gargot had said it would be, so it turned out.

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A SHADOW OF DEATH

I

I AM only a globe-trotter.

I am neither a Public Works, like young MacPegg, who lately shot himself in the bungalow down by the residency, nor a judge, like old Pawney. It need hardly be said I am not the resident, and indeed I have quite as little business in Rajputana as he has. I am, not to put too fine a point upon it, merely a visitor staying with my ancient schoolfellow, Clive Warren, who has a queer billet in these parts in connection with ryots, He has to "develop their interests and report thereon to the Supreme Government."

Our intimacy is of long standing, for it began in our boyhood, when it was Warren's custom—not exclusively of an afternoon—to punch my head, which, being very large, was much in request among my schoolfellows for that purpose.

We met again a month or so ago in Calcutta, whither I had arrived from Japan, on the business above alluded to, and where he was engaged in presenting one of those reports to the Supreme Government. We were as much delighted to see each other as might have been expected from our long separation, and he immediately insisted on bringing me back here with him to see what Anglo-Indian life is like in an up-country station, and a native "protected" state.

But life here is very agreeable for those who are unprotected like myself, and it has a novelty surpassing that of any pantomime, and almost any curtain-lifter.

I mention my being merely a globe-trotter, because I hope thus to disarm criticism. I am not up to the minutiæ of Anglo-India description: I can just call

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luncheon "tiffin," and my early cup of tea "chota-házri." I have presence of mind enough to offer fellows a "tcheroot" when I want them to help themselves out of my cigar-case—and how warmly one urges their acceptance when they are Rs.2.8 a hundred! Yes, and to pronounce cheroot as if it began with a capital T. I have broken myself of calling "gháris" cabs, and "pegs" whiskies and sodas. I shout for "ag" when I want the matches, and for "chokra" when I mean the waiter; but, bless you, I am nothing but a beginner, and when I talk Hindustani to the servants—natives, I mean to say—I break into a cold perspiration if they begin to answer me in that language. So, if I give things English names where I don't know the Indian ones, I hope you will kindly excuse it—for Rome was not built in a day, and one can't forget one's native language in five weeks, however intelligent one may be.

One of my "imported ways"—as Warren calls them—is a habit of going out in the middle of the day, to look for things to photograph, which, every one assures me, will end in fever, and probably the grave. I did this at first in a small hat—I do think I'm coming on—but it gave such offence, that I had to take to a "terai," viz. two grey felt wide-awakes, worn one over the other in the traditional Hebraic manner. Even then I was told by all the station that I should have a touch of the sun before I was much older; but this I put down to local pride, for it is extraordinary how the Anglo-Indian plumes himself on the horrors of the climate.

A few days ago, in my midday wanderings, I found myself several miles from cantonments in a very characteristic spot, which at once took my fancy, and I made up my mind that there was subject-matter for several volleys of my hand-camera.

It was a valley, not very wide, nor indeed very long—perhaps a quarter of a mile in width, and rather more than twice as much in length. It was entirely treeless, except that in one part of it there stood a group of dead banyans—if I spell them like people instead of trees, you'll excuse it. Perhaps those weird trees require moisture about their roots, and certainly there was not enough anywhere in that valley to dissolve the gum at the back of a two-pie

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stamp—there's local colour for you! I begin to regret my foolish frankness as to being only a globe-trotter.

The valley was very stony, and the stones were evidently the chosen place for the local residents to crawl and dart about on, about midday. In the middle of the valley stood a ruined temple—I should rather say a temple very much out of repair, and apparently deserted. In India you can never exactly tell whether a temple really is deserted; but there was certainly no clergy-house attached.

It was not an uncommon make of temple. There was a sort of little courtyard in front, surrounded by a low wall. Then a square room—the sanctuary itself—shut in by walls on three sides, the fourth consisting mainly of a wide doorway, with pillars and a couple of window-openings; over all a minaret, or blunt spire, rose forty feet or so into the air, this pagoda arrangement being very much enriched with carvings of Hindu gods and goddesses of singularly unfettered manners.

The front of the temple faced down the valley towards Benares or Timbuctoo, or some such sacred spot; the long, blank sides looked, therefore, to right and left. Opposite one of these, a dozen yards or less away, was another very tiny temple.

I first photographed the valley as a whole, then, drawing nearer, opened fire on the two temples; next I did the smaller temple alone, after which I raked the front of the larger one at close range, so as to show the carved pillars of the door, with a dusky glimpse of the bland deity within—the gentle Parwati, wreathed with skulls, and belted with life-like human heads.

I ended with the weird dead trees, after which I began to feel that the valley was constructed on the principles of a "bainmarie," only that it was upside down, and I was entirely exposed to the fire above me.

I therefore retreated to the smaller temple, intending there to eat my biscuits and drink the tepid liquid out of my flask, and perhaps fire another parting shot or so while doing so. It was not disagreeable to find oneself in the shade, and I sat down in the tiny sanctuary with a sense of making myself at home that Ganesh himself could not have surpassed, though it was his shrine. I

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took the stopper from the flask, and began to suck out its contents with no other preoccupation than that of preventing my tongue from being dragged up inside. I then munched a sandwich, with a brutal disregard of its beefy unfitness in that place, which would have done honour to an old-established Sahib of the Sahiblog.

But suddenly my munching stopped dead in mid-munch, and the meaty slice was suffered to drop unheeded out of the unbitten fragment in my hand.

What made me stare was this—

There was the valley—that alone would not have so much surprised me—there was the heathenish, irrelevant temple turning its blind side-wall to me, and there was that ghostly group of what had been trees, and over all were the blazing fires of an Indian midday sun. The whole valley panted and gasped in the horrible glare—the air swayed and shivered over the baked rock and slag; and all this I noticed with a strong apprehension, quite different from the merely pictorial notice I had given the scene at first, and yet I was consciously regarding now none of these things. My eyes were fastened on the line of blank, blazing wall in front of me, and my eyes were probably starting out of my head.

I have read many ghost stories in my time, and I have noted with true concern the degeneration of the species, for what could be feebler than the mere contemporary spook? There have been times, when I was younger, when I have read of ghosts until such a sense of the supernatural came over me that I truly deserved the Victoria Cross for venturing alone after dark into the spare bedroom. But never, until that day, in the pitiless light of an Indian noon, had I fully learned what supernatural horror means. It means a sort of chilly, burning sickness, a pervading, penetrating sense of contamination, and vague dread—as a foul criminal might feel, suddenly arrested, without any information as to which of his crimes has been dragged to light, a shuddering, nerveless wretchedness, a sinking at the heart, as if one's soul should be slipping down out of its raiment of the flesh into fathomless cold depths beneath.

It was a sudden, sharp revelation of wickedness: a personal consciousness of the presence of crime. Yet

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what I actually saw as yet was only this: on the wall over against me was a shadow, the shadow of a man, silhouetted sharply on the dazzling, shadeless stone, as upon a screen.

Now when we see shadows on a screen in common life, the screen is of translucent fabric, the shadow is thrown on it from a light behind. But here the screen was of solid stone, and the light was almost directly overhead. The shadow should have fallen the other way, foreshortened, on to the flagged pavement between me and the temple.

What cast the shadow-shape? Where was this tall, slight man of the Sahiblog—as was plain from his dress—whose presentment was before me? With a thumping heart I crept out from my little shrine and peered around. Except myself, there was nothing that had life in all the valley, save the darting lizards on the stones. The shadow was not motionless: it moved, so that sometimes one would have said that the man who cast it must be facing towards me, then he would turn his side-face, and the profile was clean-cut against the glaring stone. A very handsome man, one would say, very fine, high-bred features; of masterful bearing, and impatient. Presently another shadow grew upon the wall—a girl's, but not an English girl's. The dress was native, and there was something Eastern in the very walk and mien of this shadow lady—for she was a lady. One felt it without arguing from the difference between her dress and that of the ordinary Hindu women of the bazaar.

When they met I stood breathless, watching, as if gazing on an acted tableau, but with what a different interest! My heart had risen up into my throat and seemed to choke me with its sickening beating. I had a horrible, unreasoning knowledge that I was staring at the first scene of a tragedy.

They met, the young man drawing the lady towards himself, affectionately yet respectfully, and so, holding each other by both hands, they stood, half a yard apart, as though talking together earnestly. And now there came upon the stone another shadow, another actor took part in the strange drama. At the corner of the wall, towards the bottom of the valley—the corner nearest to the front

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of the temple—appeared the shadow of a muffled hand; it crept further forward on the screen of stones, showing a draped arm, and finally part of a face was shadowed on the wall; this was a man's, but not a European's: there was enough of the silhouette to show the native lunghi, and the very features were those of a Hindu.

But in his hand he held a strange thing: at first its shadow was not separated from his own, but presently it writhed out into the distinct representation. It was the twisting, curling shadow of a cobra, held fast round the neck by the hood, its long body slowly coiling in the air. Then he who held it stooped, his whole head being shadowed on the stone as he leaned forward, and the cobra was set upon the ground. The arm was withdrawn, the hand and face disappeared; there were left only the shadowed lovers, and making towards them, creeping rapidly, the frightful snake.

An insane cry of warning broke from my parted lips; it woke the stony echoes of that hateful valley, and sounded ghastly to myself as the rocks and temple gave it back; but the fated lovers did not hear. Absorbed with each other, they heeded nothing but themselves, and towards them writhed the hooded reptile; low and indeterminate was his horrid shadow as he slid along the ground, but now close behind the man he slowly reared himself into sight, and once again I cried aloud, though my throat was parched and the sound came stifled, as when one tries to shout in nightmare.

Back the deadly reptile drew his head, broader was the hideous hood displayed, and then he struck!—as he did so his shadow lost itself in that of the young man who was his victim.

My eyes burned within my head; I covered them for one moment with my hand, and when I looked again there was nothing! There blazed the flat wall in the shadeless light, and on it not one smallest shadow of anything animate or inanimate.

II

My name is Clive Warren: I am collector of the Ranipur district, and I hold a special mission from the

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Supreme Government as well. I have been in this station about ten months, having been transferred from the Garamabad district last April.

Six or seven weeks ago I knocked up against old Brock in Calcutta, where he was on the globe-trot, and brought him up here to show him what life in up-country station is like. I wish to goodness I had let it alone. He is likely to be a hideous nuisance to me.

He is the most pig-headed ass in Asia, and he used to be a harmless poor devil, who generally did what one told him, and was contented. I should like to have seen him kick up his heels at school as he has been doing here.

To start with, he began with the idea—that all your globe-trotters have—that India is rather a chilly place, if anything, and behaved himself accordingly. It was quite useless to warn him that if he would go out in the middle of the day, prowling round for things to photograph, he would be down with fever before he had been a week in the station. He stuck to it, and as a rule went about in a small hat, as if he was on a walking tour in Greenland.

Of course the natural result accrued: he has had such a touch of the sun that he has gone quite silly. Though goodness knows it was not worth his while to go off his chump; there was so little of it at best.

He came in one afternoon about an hour and a half after tiffin-time, and frightened my wife out of her wits; he was so strange in his manner, so restless and excited. He did nothing but ask for me, and as soon as I appeared let me see at once that he was not himself. He became fiercely mysterious, and talked a parcel of rot about some terrible crime he was on the scent of—I declare it made a fellow quite jumpy to listen to the man. Talk of nervous excitement! I never saw anything like it. Well, I sent round for old Pillett, and he sloped in, quite by chance as it were, and as soon as he looked at Brock, called out, "I say, my dear fellow, you've done it at last. You've got fever! Let's have your temperature."

Brock did not seem a bit keen about shoving the thermometer into his mouth, and swore he had nothing the matter with him: only, he muttered, he had been witness of a terrible tragedy, and he could neither rest

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nor be easy till he had done something towards its discovery. But Pillett was quite firm, and for a minute or so Brock had to hold his tongue, and stand still with the thermometer sticking out of the corner of his mouth, while we tried to chat indifferently.

When he had got it back Pillett looked a bit puzzled; then he shook the thing, and seemed to think of trying again, but Brock would not have it at any price.

"Certainly there is no great fever," admitted the doctor, gloomily, as if he had hoped to find a hundred-and-six or thereabouts, "but I should strongly advise your going to bed, Brock."

But Brock intimated pretty plainly that he did not want anybody's advice.

"I shall go and see the judge," he remarked earnestly, "or is it the resident? Does one go to the resident or the judge about criminal cases—in case of murder, for instance?"

Pillett and I tried not to catch each other's eye: all the same I felt a sort of creepiness down my back. Who so quiet as old Podgy Brock at ordinary times? The very last chap one would have suspected of jimjams. The doctor spoke soothingly. But Brock grew extremely shirty, as if he twigged perfectly.

"It is useless speaking on a matter of such importance to fellows like you," he declared, with great candour. "If a horrible crime could be traced with quinine, or a clinical thermometer, you'd be invaluable; but, as it is, I shall go to the resident. If he's not the right man, he at least will have sense enough to tell me who is."

We thanked him kindly, and Pillett said "All right." But all the same he advised me presently not to lose sight of the poor chap. So off I started and dogged him to the residency, where it was "darwasa band," so we might both have saved ourselves the trouble. But he was not going to be done. Off he trotted to the judge's bungalow at the very other end of cantonments, and all on his two feet, mind you, as if the early afternoon was just the time for tramping along a particularly badly-shaded road in Rajputana.

The judge had gone to Chotamahál last night, and was not expected back till late to-night, so there was another

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disappointment. Back we trudged together, Brock seeming too much preoccupied to resent my having followed him.

"You know a place about two miles from here, where there's a temple in a little valley?" he suddenly asked me.

I am a fellow who takes no interest in the neighbourhood beyond my work, and I seldom poke round in search of the picturesque. I did not seem to recognize the place, though he went on to describe it more fully.

"I don't know what it may be called," he said, "but it is a mile or so beyond Sikandra, and the temple is one to Devi."

As about ninety per cent. of the temples are dedicated to that divine female, that did not help me much. Personally, Hindu temples bore me to extinction.

"It is a horribly weird, lonely place," he went on. "I was there this morning."

I remarked that, were I he, I should go there no more. It was evidently an undesirable spot; it was there, no doubt, he had got his fever.

But he paid no attention whatever to my practical suggestion, and went on eagerly with the most awfully lunatic farrago of nonsense you ever heard. I had one intense feeling of thankfulness, which was that he was a friendless bachelor. If he were to die on my hands, what embarrassment this would spare me. I know nothing less easy than to write and tell a lady you have had the pleasure of burying her husband.

At last he seemed to have some consciousness that I was aware he was raving, after which he fell into an irritable, moody silence. By bed-time he really had a much higher temperature; but still Pillett seemed disappointed with it.

"It's high," he said, "certainly. But not nearly high enough to account for the delirium."

In the middle of the night I heard him moving, and went to his door.

"For goodness sake do not bring a light!" he shouted.

Then I heard him run to the door and turn the key in the lock.

"I am developing!" he called out through the door. "Don't you mind me—I am all right."

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I was beastly sleepy, and went back to bed. I certainly hoped he would not develop much further: for old Podgy Brock he had already developed considerably. In the morning Pillett came round to see him.

"It's an awful rum case," he confided to me, after again taking the temperature, and asking him a number of questions. "There is fever, no doubt, but nothing very much, and the whole thing does not fit a bit with the ordinary India fever. It is much more like a sort of brain-fever."

Old Pillett insisted on his lying low that day, at all events, and after a lot of fuss he consented, but only on conditions, the principal condition being that the resident and the judge should be brought to see him. Accordingly they came, Pillett and I being present.

"Are cases of snake-bite common here?" he began, and the doctor and I looked straight to our front: he was as sharp as mustard, and would have caught us sniggering in a moment.

The resident shifted a bit in his chair, and said they were, unfortunately, terribly common.

"It is computed," he stated, "that eighty thousand people die of snake-bite every year."

"Mostly natives," interjected the judge, comfortably.

"But in this neighbourhood?"

"This district is not specially unlucky; no, the Deccan, I believe, suffers more."

"But cases occur?"

"Oh, frequently; large numbers, in the course of the year."

"So that isolated cases would not attract much attention?" queried Brock, eagerly.

"Well," replied the resident, "it is as the judge remarked: the vast majority of cases are those of natives. You see, they go about with bare legs. If any of our fellows are bitten it is mostly through a thick boot. Fatal cases are very rare among us."

Brock paused; then he stared intently at the resident, and demanded—

"Do you remember any?"

"I remember one: it was poor young Savile of the

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thirty-second Lancers. He was attached to the lieutenant-governor of Madras, A.D.C. or something. Very good-looking fellow."

"Tall?"

"Well, no. Rather a tight little chap; but a tremendous sportsman."

"You're sure he was short?"

"Certain. All those Saviles are."

Brock seemed disappointed.

"When was he here?"

"Here? Bless you, he never was here. It happened near Ooty. He never was in the North-West Provinces or Central Provinces."

Brock fell back quite haggard.

"But here?" he persisted, "do you remember no case here?"

The resident shook his head.

"I've only been here two years," he said; "there has been no case since I came."

"I've been here five, and there's been no case," said the judge, as if it was due to him that there had not.

"Has no one been here more than five years?" asked Brock, almost indignantly.

"Well, most of us find five years quite long enough," said the resident blandly; and we all grinned our agreement with him. "Ranipur is no catch, I can tell you."

"Chudder's been a long while, I fancy," observed Pillett, meditatively.

Chudder is bear-leader to the young Rajah. At the moment he was on leave; at which intelligence Brock gnashed his teeth openly.

"And now," inquired the resident, mildly, "why do you want to know all this? It seems to have some peculiar interest for you, Mr. Brock."

If Brock were not the future Lord Downchurch I doubt if the resident would have answered all his potting questions as patiently; but the resident is one of those men who can no more help cottoning to a title than some other men can help pulling the last leg sharp into bed at night lest bogey should grab hold of it.

"Interest!" cried Brock; "it's not only peculiar,

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it's terrible. If it is not unravelled some awful crime will go unpunished."

Again we looked to our front, and the judge fidgeted. He had a constitutional horror of any one with the jumps. He had had them himself, and liked to forget it.

"Listen!" said Brock, turning sharp on us, though none of us were interrupting, "I will not say now why I have asked all these questions. I had meant doing so when I asked you to come here; but I will ask you to go with me where I was yesterday, and at the same hour; and if you need then to inquire the reason of my questions, I will certainly tell you."

He proceeded to tell us where he was yesterday, but Pillett put a stopper instantly on the idea of his going there or anywhere else that day.

"And you choose the very time of day that would be most dangerous! My good sir, you are in a very nervous state, and a very little would unhinge you altogether."

For three or four days Brock consented to wait, then he would wait no more, and the day before yesterday we accompanied him to his bothering valley, where he led us to a little temple facing the side-wall of a bigger one.

"It is about a quarter of an hour too soon," he said, sinking his voice to a sort of mystic whisper, "but that is better than being too late."

He was evidently highly excited, and Pillett shook his head ominously as he listened to him. I pulled out a cheroot, but Brock almost knocked it out of my hand.

"Good heavens!" he said, in a passionate, stifled voice, "would you stand smoking here with such a tragedy enacted within a dozen feet of you?"

The judge fidgeted, and Pillett hardly tried any longer to hide his opinion of poor Brock's state.

He led me aside.

"We'd better pretend to see whatever he says he sees," he whispered; "it's the only way."

I nodded, and presently Pillett got hold of the resident, who promised to act on the tip.

As the time drew nearer poor Brock's excitement was really something terrible to witness. He broke into a cold sweat, and his whole body shook. We all pretended not to notice him; Pillett said it was the only way.

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"Now," whispered Brock.

He had his watch in his hand, and I could see it was just twenty-five minutes past one. His lips looked parched, and he could hardly articulate the words. We watched his face; it was turned upon the flat line of wall of the temple opposite. His eyes were fixed upon it as if he were in a mesmeric trance, and Pillett told me afterwards that he then began to think it was, in fact, some very rum case of hypnotic influence.

"What do you see?" whispered the doctor, earnestly, as if he saw the deuce of a lot himself.

But Brock shook his head.

"Nothing yet," he said; "perhaps my watch is fast."

We waited breathlessly, though none of us but poor Brock had the least expectation of seeing anything at all. The mere strain of waiting thus in silence makes one feel queer, just as when one is watching artillery practice, and waiting for the gun to go off.

At last Brock drew a long breath.

"What time do you all make it?" he asked, and we told him.

The mean time between us was thirty-one minutes past one.

"It was all over the other day by twenty-six minutes past," he said: "but it is possible my watch was slow then. The real time may have been later."

We nodded, and waited on in silence. At last I could not stand it any longer.

"Your watch must have been slow indeed, the other day," I observed, bitterly; "or it may be that tragedies do not, after all, occur here daily. Few places are so fortunate as that."

"The tragedy may have happened years ago," he replied, still glaring at that flat expanse of wall.

"I beg your pardon, I thought it was on Monday," I remarked with withering sarcasm.

"No, no; you do not understand," he answered.

I admitted that that was very probable, and after a few more minutes Brock himself said there was no use in waiting any longer. He looked puzzled and worried, and Pillett told me afterwards it would have been almost

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better for the chap if he had fancied he had seen something. We started home, Brock growing calmer as we got further away from the valley.

He was evidently busy with his own thoughts. I thought he would apologize for our having seen nothing; but he did not. As we were turning into our compound, he suddenly asked—

"And Chudder—when will he be back?"

"Chudder?"

"Yes. Didn't you say that was the name?—the young Rajah's bear-leader, who has been here a long time."

"Oh, ah—yes, that's his name. Why, he took a year's leave to Europe. He's only been gone a month. He'll be back in about eleven months."

"That fits in well enough," remarked Brock, getting out of the tum-tum, and he walked into the bungalow looking easier in his mind than I had seen him for the last four days.

This morning he went off on his way to Mount Abu, Ahmedabad, Baroda, and Bombay. I must say I breathed more freely when I was rid of him. I wonder whether I had better write a line to old Downchurch about him? He seemed so sensible the last day or so that I do not think it is necessary.

III

Eleven months ago I wrote the above, and now I have to add a sequel. I was sitting with Pillett a week ago on my verandah, smoking, and was just about to raise a peg to my lips when a tonga drove in at our compound, and who should be in it but old Brock.

"Good lord!" I ejaculated.

"I am quite well, thank you, Warren," says Brock, as free and easy as you please, jumping out of the tonga, and coming up the verandah steps with a hand-bag. "How do, Pillett? Have you a bed for me, Warren? If not, I'll go to the dák-bungalow. You did not expect me, did you?"

Of course I didn't; but it was bosh talking of the dák-bungalow. Anglo-Indian hospitality is not what it

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was: in these days of trains and tourists we really cannot afford it. But we have not arrived yet at leaving an old schoolfellow to the bleak comfort of a dák-bungalow.

My bearer was already seeing about Brock's baggage being taken indoors. He now inquired very politely, but without much enthusiasm, for Mrs. Warren and the butcha.

"There are two now," I replied, rather sadly; "they're all right, thanks."

"And Chudder?" continued Brock, eagerly.

"Chudder!" cried Pillett and I in a breath.

"Yes; is he back? He was on leave, you know, when I was here before."

We stared. Of course he was. Brock had never, so far as we knew, clapped eyes on him.

"Oh, yes; he's back. He got back last week. It's very nice of you to ask after him," I said sarcastically.

But Brock was not a bit sat on.

"Let's see," he said; "whereabouts is his bungalow?"

"It's the big one nearest to the palace gates, at the bazaar end of cantonments," I answered in astonishment.

"Do you feel inclined to stroll that far and introduce me?" asked Brock, as cool as a cucumber, and I actually got up, and away we went, all three of us. As Pillett remarked afterwards, there's a sort of power about the chap. Brock had only arrived in Bombay three days ago.

"You'll probably get a letter to-morrow," he said, "to tell you I'm coming. By the way, I'm engaged to be married now."

I remarked sweetly that that accounted for his sudden determination to revisit Asia. Whereat he stared.

"On the contrary," he declared gravely, "it made it rather hard to arrange. Nor is my determination at all sudden; I always intended to come back. I only waited for Chudder's return."

Pillett had my arm, and he dug me in the ribs in a way that a doctor should have known was dangerous.

"He ought to be thundering grateful," I observed. But Brock took no notice; his power of ignoring the most biting sarcasm constitutes his peculiar strength. He is as invulnerable as a tortoise.

Chudder Sahib was at the palace, but I left word that

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he was to come and dine with us, and as it turned out he did. As soon as they were introduced, Brock handed him a chit in an envelope, coolly remarking that he would call on Major Chudder next day about noon.

I had no opportunity of getting hold of Chudder alone to assure him that my old friend was really quite harmless. But luckily they got on like a house afire.

"Warren," said Brock to me next day about a quarter to twelve, "I'm going to keep my appointment with Major Chudder. I have asked him to come with me to that valley—would you like to come with us?"

"Hadn't we better get the resident and the judge and Pillett?" I inquired. "They enjoyed it so last time."

"Pray do not come if it bores you," said Brock, calmly.

"Chudder is really more suitable. I merely made the offer."

For some reason I decided to go with him. There's a deal of human nature in a man, as the late Mr. Lowell observes, and his obvious indifference as to whether I went or stayed at home made me rather keen to go.

At Chudder's door there was a dog-cart, and Chudder himself was ready. We jumped in, and in a quarter of an hour were near the valley.

"We'll get out here," he said, "and send the sais home with the cart." He proceeded to do so, telling the man to return for us in three-quarters of an hour.

"What you wrote to me is very strange," said Chudder, as we walked towards the valley, turning to Brock.

"Is it possible you came out again to India about that affair?" I asked Brock.

He nodded gravely.

"It was on my conscience. A ghastly crime has been brought to my knowledge, and I feel bound to do what I can to bring it to light."

"But, Brock, we came here with you and saw nothing."

"I know; but what I saw is perhaps to be seen only once in the year on the anniversary of the crime's committal. This is the day: it is a year ago to-day since I saw this thing." He turned to Chudder: "And do you," he asked, earnestly, "remember any case of death from snake-bite among the Sahiblog here?"

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"Yes, one; and that is the strange part of it. It was a young fellow who was assistant judge here then—seven years ago at least—and I well remember him. He was very much what you describe: tall, stalwart and slim, with thin aquiline features, and very aristocratic bearing. He was about seven and twenty, or perhaps thirty."

We were in the valley. Certainly there was something ghastly about it; a sort of horrible criminality in its suggestion.

"That was very odd about the photograph," said Chudder. Whereupon I looked interrogatively at Brock, who made an explanation.

"Do you remember how you and Pillett were determined I had fever that day? Well, I admit I was feverishly excited, and I could not sleep. So I got up and lighted my developing lamp, and started developing a plate out of my hand camera. To my intense surprise I found it was a photograph of the scene I had witnessed here; then I remembered that when I had cried out and started back, I had brushed against the catch with my sleeve and I suppose the plate was exposed; of course, the plates and exposure were instantaneous—anyway, there it was. Just as I was trying to intensify it—hydroquinone is a wretched developer, though it is clean—you came banging at my door, and flurried me so much that on getting back to the washing-stand, where I was working, I dropped the plate on to the marble top, and it smashed into a hundred atoms."

There was nothing the least cracked about Brock's manner to-day, and as Chudder seemed to take him quite seriously, I quietly did the same.

"Here we are," observed Brock, coolly pulling out a small hand-camera and adjusting the exposing-pin, so that one touch would fire it off. We none of us now spoke much; Brock was evidently again growing excited, but so, I think, were we all three.

"Now," said Brock, and he pointed to the wall opposite us. He had his watch in his hand, and this time his calculations were not out.

A creeping sensation came in my back, for there, sure enough, plainly pictured on that blazing, sunlit wall, was the shadow of a young man such as Chudder had described.

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"Good heavens!" gasped Chudder, as the profile was cut deeply on the wall, "it is poor Carnegie."

Click went the camera; and quite calmly and yet with an intense restrained excitement, Brock pulled out the exposing-pin again. We watched, staring at that blank wall as if our eyes were glued to it, and I could plainly hear Chudder's heart thumping against his side. If anything Brock was the calmest of us; my own breath seemed to choke me as it came.

Another portrait on the wall! A girl's, a native girl's, but no bazaari one. There was all the grace, all the haughtiness of a Rajput princess in her figure and in her movements.

"Do you know her also?" whispered Brock, as if the shadow might hear him. I looked at Chudder: he was deathly pale.

"It is Saraswati, the princess," he stammered, "elder sister of the Rajah himself. Her father was not the Rajah's, they were half brother and sister. She was called Moti Mahal, the Pearl of the Palace."

I rushed a sudden side-glance at Brock; his face was worth seeing. It glowed—glowed not with the mere heat of an Indian noon, but with a peculiar blending of passionate interest and serene triumph. And yet now he was, I think, the least excited of the three of us. His business-like attention to his camera was gruesome.

Chudder was far more off himself. You see, he had actually known these people; the title-rôle of the piece had tiffened with him.

And now came a third actor on to the stage—on to the edge of the shadeless blank wall crept out another shadow-portrait: that of an elderly lank native, such as we all know by heart; but not a native of the babu type. Leaning slowly forward, with an ineffable stealth and treacherousness, he seemed to brood over the other two—the young Angresi sahib and the princess, who were holding each other by both hands, in the attitude of intimate friends talking earnestly together, perhaps half a yard apart.

We felt how that wicked shadow must be glaring at them—what a hatred was lowering in the eyes we could not see. And round his arm twisted and writhed another

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shadow yet—the horrid, twining, coiling likeness of a cobra, braceleting his arm, yet held tight behind the hood, came out from the shadow of his narrow native sleeve.

Then he bent lower—lower—ever so stealthily—until his hand's shadow and the shadow of the stones that strew the ground mingled; and then he came erect again. And there, rearing itself up from the earth, was the creeping shadow-likeness of the snake, curling nearer and nearer to the fated lovers.

"Do you know that scoundrel also?" whispered Brock, hoarsely, with that odd fear we all three obeyed of startling the shadow of what was long ago.

"Yes," he stuttered, hoarsely, "it is Lal Singh, the girl's father. Such a deed would be held glorious in a Rajput prince, whose daughter had forgotten her pride."

As slowly as they had come all the shadows died from off the wall, and there was left only the hot stone blinking in the staring light: only the oven-like, empty valley, and the darting lizards, and we three fellows staring blankly into one another's faces.

"Do you think," inquired Brock, presently, "that with the evidence we have, he could be brought to justice?"

Chudder shook his head doubtfully.

"Wheels within wheels," thought I, too limp as yet for speech. We started back to the place where the dog-cart was to meet us.

"Sahib," said the sais, when we got up to it, "there has been a sudden thing in the palace."

"In the palace! I was there less than two hours ago," said Chudder.

The sais nodded.

"Achcha, sahib! An hour ago all right. Half an hour ago Lal Singh Sahib, the Rajah Sahib's uncle, drop dead in the palace."

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THE BLACK EAGLE

I

SOME callings are regarded as "romantic," and some the world chooses to condemn as beyond the pale of romance; and Robert Markham belonged to one of the latter. But there are men who are bound to be prosaic, let their way of life be never so romantic, and men whom romance will seek out in the most apparently hopeless situations.

Robert Markham was a commercial traveller, and that too of his own deliberate choosing; yet odd adventures overtook him, in spite of a profession that is supposed to be of all others the most commonplace. His father had been a clergyman, and, like many others, had married early, and had begotten a somewhat numerous family. Unfortunately he had died early too, without having had time at all to "make up what he was pleased to call his mind" as to how his eight children were to be educated and started in life.

His widow was even more in the dark than her husband had been; and she puzzled so much over the question that she puzzled herself out of the world altogether in little more than a year, leaving her eldest son, Robert, of the ripe age of eleven years.

The orphans had no wicked uncle in Norfolk, but they had several rather good aunts in other counties, who took a nephew or niece apiece, leaving still three or four unallotted. One of these was got into the Blue Coat School, another into a "Clergy Orphan Asylum" (which caused her brethren to conclude she was mad without their ever having suspected it). One had a voice and sang himself up in a Cathedral Choir School.

But Robert declared he would be a commercial traveller. And in process of time he did become one,

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though the aunts were all scandalized, and his father and mother would have turned in their grave had there been room enough—but it was a cheap grave, and there wasn't.

Robert said he wanted to travel and see the world, and in no other way could make money out of doing so. Perhaps he was restless, and averse from a life that would imply monotony and stationary application. Anyway, he did like the calling he had so eccentrically (as his aunts declared) adopted; stuck to it, and prospered in it.

By the time he was six or seven and twenty he had travelled many circuits, and could have written an interesting guide-book. For he had eyes and ears, and a sort of genius for picking up whatever scraps of quaint or peculiar tradition might hang about a neighbourhood.

Of course he did not find all roads equally interesting; some, in truth, were dull enough. But nearly all had something, to him, interesting about parts at least of them.

He had a genius for doing good business in rather out-of-the-way, unlikely-seeming places, so that some of his beats were mostly neglected by others of his fraternity. In process of time his employers noticed this, and they came at last to leave him a very free hand as to his journeys.

One very wintry afternoon in November he had to get from Sandford to Merton, two smallish towns in East Anglia, where he was breaking new ground; and between which there was no railway. So that he hired a trap and drove. At the village of Barlow, five miles on his way, he did some unlooked-for business, but the doing of it naturally detained him, and it was dusk before he drove out of the long, straggling street and got into the open country again.

The wind was chill and came from the invisible, but not distant, German Ocean, with threats of sleety rain in its teeth. The land lay dead, and deathly silent, the fields all grey and dim, and not a leaf left on the bare, black branches of the few trees, that shivered in the gusts. Here and there, across the flats one could see a farmhouse or two, but signs of habitation were scarce, and in the sad,

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sodden fields few cattle were to be seen, and fewer labourers.

Then the wind seemed to pause, and with the more complete silence came the snow. Since leaving Barlow not a cart, not a man, had he passed, and not a living thing passed him. But the road was a good one, if ugly and straight, broad, and absolutely flat; a very important road once, though half forgotten since the old coaching days.

As the darkness fell the snow came thicker, and the utter silence grew more weirdly intense. Robert felt half oppressed by it and tried to whistle away its uncanny influence. But there seemed something indecorous in it, as if one had made some frivilous, noisy sound in an empty church, and he soon stopped.

II

"Well, I must say this looks cheerier," said Robert to himself, looking round on the comfortable, well-warmed room complacently.

He had the whole inn to himself, and it was a big one; but, though big, cosy and inviting. A sort of courtyard, with a fine wrought-iron screen, divided the house from the road, and here and there, in the design of the iron-work, was a spread eagle criss-crossed to show the heraldic tincture of sable.

Altogether the place had the air of a manor house rather than that of an inn. The entrance hall was tesselated with antique heraldic tiles; its darkly panelled walls had a richly carved cornice, showing many shields of arms; and the room where Robert was had still finer oak panelling, a still more imposing cornice, and a magnificent chimney-piece of carven wood, painted and gilded in parts, and framing an heraldic achievement of Jacobean plaster-work; of Jacobean plaster-work was the ceiling also. Some magnificence is comfortless, but this place was comfort itself; and the chill outside accentuated it.

Presently across the great oriel windows heavy red damask curtains were drawn, and the storm and the night shut out. Ruddy glowed the firelight, blinking in the polished mirrors of the panelling, and with a sigh

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of grateful contentment Robert sank into the soft arms of a huge easy-chair beside the hearth, close to which a smallish table was drawn up, soon to be spread with a snowy cloth, and furnished with a generous promise of hospitality.

Well, too, was that hospitable promise kept. If it had been ordered in advance a more excellent repast could not have been set before the hungry traveller. A plate of hare soup, of first-rate flavour, a bit of fish, and a roasted capon, larded and stuffed, stewed fruit and thick cream, made up a dinner just such as Robert would have chosen—and all excellent, cooked perfectly, and of first-rate quality.

Home-brewed October ale washed all this down, and afterwards a glass of port, as tawny as the mellowed damask of the curtains, with the twinkle of the firelight in it.

Nor was mine host, who waited on his guest in person, a man to "put you off" good cheer.

A thought young, perhaps, for a Boniface, he was still not too young, and, if hardly stout enough for the part, he was the express image of good health, good temper, and cheerfulness. He was neither tediously loquacious nor austerely taciturn; ready to respond if a guest were disposed to talk, he knew how to hold his tongue if the guest preferred his own thought and silence.

"What is your house called?" inquired Robert. "I suppose there is a sign outside somewhere, but I did not notice it."

"Well, sir, our house tried at first to call itself the Black Eagle; but the name never took on, and no one will ever speak of it except as the Manor House."

"Why the Black Eagle?"

"From the arms of the family—the Stows of the Wold—to whom it belonged."

"Belonged? Whose is it now?"

"Well, that's more than I could tell you, sir, or the Lord Chancellor, either, I'm thinking. For the estate's in Chancery, and the Lord Chancellor of England is my landlord."

As Robert was looking interested, mine host continued—

"For centuries all the land hereabouts was the estate

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of Lord Stow of the Wolds, though my lord's surname changed four or five times, the title being one of those very old ones that go in the female line. The thirteenth Lord Stow left a daughter and heiress married to Squire Fenn, of Fenncourt, in the next country, who ill-treated her, and, as some say, killed her. But nothing of that was proved, and at her death my Lady Stow left a son, so that for a hundred and fifty years Fenn was the family surname; and would be still if any one could prove themselves Lord or Lady Stow."

"Has the family died out?"

"That's what neither the House of Lords nor the Lord Chancellor can say. The twenty-first Lord died of enteric in India nearly twenty years ago, and less than a year after his marriage. He was in the Army and A.D.C. to the Viceroy. His widow came home, overland as they call it, that is, she left the ship at Brindisi to travel through Italy by train; but from the day she left the vessel all trace of her was lost. She was expecting her confinement, and she may be alive now and the mother of the owner of this house, or she may have died in child-birth and she and her child both be passed beyond all human greatness."

"But has no one else put in a claim to title and estates?"

"Yes, sir, more than one; but they cannot establish it. So all is in Chancery, and no one can guess whose it will all be at last."

III

The landlord was gone and Robert Markham was enjoying his pipe and book in the big armchair by the wide hearth; stopping every now and then on purpose to realize how comfortable he was.

In this way an hour passed, and then occurred the first of those experiences which caused us to say that romance pursued Robert in spite of his prosaic calling of "the road."

He got up to reach a match off the high chimney-piece, and as he did so something caused him to look round. It was not a sound, for the room was absolutely soundless

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except for the low and pleasant noise a red fire makes.

But, however it was, some impulse made him look all at once behind him, and instantly he found himself not alone. Standing close to him, with one hand resting on the back of the chair from which he had just risen, was a lady. She was young and beautiful; not more certainly than nineteen years of age, but dressed in a fashion that a century ago would already have been long obsolete.

Robert himself was big, tall, and stalwart; and he admired the lady none the less because she was small and fragile-looking. Her air was grave, as if she had an important matter in hand, but not at all sad or melancholy. In fact, her face was naturally cheerful. And, though her colour was rather delicate, it had the glow of health and life.

Robert Markham had never seen such beautiful hair, as this lady's, of a brilliant silky brown; but beyond their beauty, there was something peculiar about her eyes that first puzzled him; something that gave them an odd effect, an unusual subtle charm. *One eye was dark blue, the other dark brown.*

Of such a peculiarity the young man had often heard, and had supposed it must be ugly. In reality he found it delightful. He noted well the beauty of her hands, and that on the left hand, covered by a half-glove, were very splendid jewels.

"Why do you wear that glove?" he thought, but without saying anything aloud.

The lady smiled, and, as if in answer, drew it from her hand.

On the back of it was a mark like a spread eagle, as black as a patch.

"The badge of Stow," said the lady. "That every heiress of Stow bears who conveys our house away to strangers."

Her intonation was peculiar, refined but yet countrified. Otherwise it was exactly as if a lady of to-day were talking to a gentleman of her acquaintance. Nevertheless Robert knew quite well that the beautiful girl within an arm's length of him was no living, breathing contemporary. And yet he had never believed in ghosts,

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nor was he now startled or afraid. Many a hero dreads the supernatural; but Robert Markham had as little sense of horror as if he had just been introduced to his fair companion by her chaperon in a ballroom.

And never had he resented more an interruption than when the door handle clicked, warning of some one's approach, and the lady drew back. Between the door and the chair in which Robert had been sitting stood a tall screen of many folds, covered with antique Spanish leather, stamped and gilded. The lady drew back in such a way that, still in full view of Robert, no one could have seen her from the door.

"Sir," said the landlord, opening the door and just entering the room, without advancing into it, "I knocked twice, but you did not answer; to say the truth I thought you might be asleep. . . . I merely wished to know if you require anything else."

Robert was thinking more of the lady than of the landlord, and did not answer at once. Had there been no screen between them, he wondered, would she have been as visible to his host as she was to himself?

"Thank you," he said presently, "you can bring me a kettle of hot water, some whisky, and a lemon."

The door closed again; and again Robert and the lady were alone together.

She turned to him and drew a little nearer.

"You will bring back Fortuna," she said; and with a grave curtsey she saluted him and simply vanished.

IV

The second romantic occurrence that came Robert Markham's way took place nearly a year after.

In the September following his firm informed him that they had need of his services abroad.

"For we know you are a bit of a linguist," the senior partner explained, "and you're the very man for the job in other ways."

"Well," admitted Robert, modestly, "I can talk French rather well and Italian rather badly—both self-taught, and neither with a good accent, I expect."

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"Well, Italy's the place, and your accent won't matter much."

Then the matter was explained in detail to him.

On the night of a late October day Robert, having been already nearly a month in Italy, and finding himself much more *au fait* at the language, arrived, too late for dinner, at the town of Aquila in the Abruzzi. The inn was a lamentable contrast to the Manor House of Stow, draughty, dirty, comfortless; and the supper to which he sat down presently looked very little promising.

But something happened, before he had eaten much of it, that soon drove all thought of its goodness or badness out of his head.

He was reading as he ate; and had not noticed who was waiting on him. Presently a fresh dish was set down in front of him, and he noticed the hand that placed it there—a woman's, well shaped and aristocratic, and with a peculiar mark upon the bare wrist, close to the hand.

For once in his life Robert started; for the mark on the wrist was that of a spread eagle, and black, as black and as distinct as if it had been tattooed there.

Opposite him was a large, though dingy, mirror; and as he abruptly lifted his head he saw in it, plainly reflected, the image of the lady he had seen in the inn at Stow.

Then he got up, and, with his back to the mirror, he looked earnestly at the girl. The apparition of the lady in the inn at Stow had caused him no perturbation; now, though he knew he was gazing at no apparition but a healthy, cheery young woman of live flesh and blood, he felt an astonishment so overwhelming that it was uncomfortable, disturbing.

Except in dress the figures were identical; height, build, face, expression—all seemed simply the same. And this girl had the other lady's rare peculiarity—one eye of a dark blue-grey, the other of a dark hazel-brown.

"Is your name Fortuna?" he asked.

The girl replied at once, with scarcely any surprise, that it was. No doubt the Signore had heard some one call her by it.

But he had not.

Presently he sat down again and finished his supper.

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Half an hour later Fortuna brought him the coffee he had ordered. And this time it was her turn to be astonished.

"Fortuna," he said, "I am a commercial traveller; that is all. But I am a gentleman, of good birth; and I could prove to you easily, too, of good character. Would you marry a foreigner?"

"Signore!"

Robert laughed.

"I know you never saw me till an hour ago. But would you marry me?"

The girl was silent; astounded indeed, but not, as he could see, unpleasantly.

He continued, in the same matter-of-fact manner as if his proposal were the most natural thing in the world.

"But would you marry me if you knew—if I could prove you to be, yourself English, the possessor of an ancient and noble name, and the heiress of an English title, the heiress of a great English estate? For I can. Whether you consent to marry me or not I will prove all that. And I will marry you, if you consent, whether I prove all or no."

He watched her for a few moments, and then rang the the bell. The Padrone of the inn answered it.

"Signore Padrone," said Robert, fixing on him his clear, penetrating eyes, "I think you will have to find a new Cameriera; I think the Signorina Fortuna will marry me; will you tell her who she is?"

Not for one moment did Robert take his keen eyes from the landlord's shifty face that had taken a livid pallor. Fortuna watched both men eagerly.

"Signore!" stammered the landlord.

"Tell Fortuna," persisted the Englishman relentlessly; "tell her how, nineteen years ago, an English lady came to your Albergo—not this Albergo here in Aquila—but to the inn you kept then, nearer Brindisi, on the direct road north from Brindisi—an English lady with money and jewels and plenty of good baggage; an English lady who was taken ill in your house, and died—died in childbirth, having borne a girl-child, whom you and your wife called Fortuna; how you left that place and came here to Aquila in the Abruzzi, where English travellers are rare; how you did not know who the English lady was,

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but might easily, by inquiries, have found out; how you preferred to remain ignorant, and made no inquiries at all. You did nothing; you had the lady buried under the name you read on her baggage, and so is her burial registered; but you caused no tomb to be placed on her grave, where a casual stranger might have read her name. Tell Fortuna, this lady was her mother; and that the few letters and papers the lady had with her you have still safely locked away—tell Fortuna all this, and you need *not* tell her who spent the lady's money, who took the lady's jewels, and her smart dresses. *But*—refuse to tell her, and *I* will tell all this to the Procurator-General in Rome, having first informed the Syndic, here in Aquila; and we shall see what happens."

Slowly, and with a ruthless-seeming deliberation, did Robert Markham say all this—as though to drive it remorselessly home—in reality, for two other reasons; first, because he had to choose the Italian words; and again because he himself was thinking it all out as he went on from step to step.

"Come now!" he urged presently; "which shall it be? The Procurator of the King, or Fortuna?" And the landlord told Fortuna, Robert quietly taking down, as from a dictation, all he said. From it he learned—what no guessing could have arrived at—the town where Fortuna had been born, where her mother had died, and been buried.

Within three months Lady Stow's death and burial, and Fortuna's birth, had been proved; and Robert Markham was the husband of the beautiful Baroness Stow of the Wolds, who, being English, was only just beginning to pick up a word or two of the English tongue.

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THE FRIEND WHO CAME BACK

I

As he walked home in the wan twilight M. l'Abbé was very lonely.

When he first came to this desolate parish of starven Sologne, a young man under thirty, the loneliness had utterly weighed him down. But he had faced it: and recognizing that it must, in all likelihood, be his life-long companion, had bravely made friends with it. In sooth it was well-nigh all the friend he had to look to.

Who on earth so lonely as a village curé, who, to his great misfortune, happens to be also a gentleman?

Well, that was twenty years ago, and still he was curé of the same poverty-stricken, windy parish, with no other companion but his loneliness. But he and it were friends now; he found little fault with it, never complained of it. It walked with him on his long journeys to visit the scattered peasant-homes that were so little poorer than his own. When he rose from his hard bed in the grey dawn, to light his scanty fire, it was awake before him, ready to join him for the day. When he lay down at night it was his sole bedfellow, and bent above him in the darkness, his unwearied guardian. At his rough meals it sat beside him: on week-days in the wan, chill church it was scarce all he had for congregation. He had, in all these years, never grown used to it, though by sheer insistence with himself he had dropped all quarrel with it. His people? He was their father, sufficiently respected; but how could he be their friend? He was willing, but were they? A hard, dour race, with a temper bred of summer drought and winter frost, wreathed autumn fogs—the very winding sheets of love—and a

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"spring" that was merely the change from black frost to black wind.

They were Catholics and believed in the Sacraments —as he thought they believed in the ice whose utility they had never learned; so a priest was a thing inevitable, like winter. But his friendship! Ah, there would be a thing to puzzle one what to do with! And, had they been willing to accept friendship at his hands, if he might have been their friend, could they have been friends of his in return?

As he walked home, the sad December light fading coldly, M. l'Abbé was very lonely. Another figure had pushed between him and his accustomed companion, and was whispering accusations against her. These troubled him; he was fain not to hear them, but this afternoon they were insistent. He knew all the faults urged against his dull friend, loneliness; he had never forgotten one of them. They had simply been forgiven.

But now, without invitation, there had overtaken him on the windy, wet road, between treeless voids of barren waste, an undesired companion who urged all the other's shortcomings—Memory.

He held out no hand to her, and made no room for her between him and his loneliness. He half dreaded her. She wove fair pictures, but he had learned that to gaze on them left but a pang behind. She had often forced herself into his mean dwelling, and hung it all about with arras of her own weaving; but the patterns were too fine, and he had pulled them down again.

And he had found her intrusive too: suffered to come herself, she had encroached, and brought with her a trapesing handmaid—Fancy. So that, calling him to consider her fading perspectives of what had been, she had basely inveigled him to behold flaunting, high-coloured paintings of what might have been.

He turned from her now, and looked resolutely outward: anywhere! Along the straight, unfenced road, athwart the grey waste that never was green, though a stale brown in summer. Here and there a windy clump of ancient thorn-bushes served to remind one that there are such things as trees in the world, though none here. Alongside the scarce-trodden road an oozy stream struggled

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through matted reeds and osiers, and once there had been a cabin, of some forgotten, long-dead peasant, much on a level with it; now, happily, abandoned and dismantled. Not that happiness was the suggestion of the fallen roof, the crumbled walls. M. l'Abbé suddenly wondered if he had lived here always—from the beginning of the world. It felt like it.

That gave Memory her stabbing-place, and she lunged at him. "Always!" Nay, forsooth! And she flung out upon the chill, dank air an oriflamme from the past, broidered with Youth and Pleasant Fancies.

He shook his head, as though to shake out of his eyes her unbidden pictures, and hastened forward a little. It was a fine head: he must have been handsome: the outline of the face was regular, the expression strong. But it was a strength that fed upon itself, and devoured beauty. There is something unpriestly in the idea of beauty, and he was a priest from head to heel—perhaps all through.

It was cold: not with the silent, keen chill of frost, but with the bragging bitterness of tearing wind.

The time drew near the birth of Christ. And Memory tried to play her poignant tunes, each note of which was a long-gone happiness, a voice that dropped into the great silence; but he durst not listen. Some fair sounds grow intolerable on occasion.

Out of the eastern distance night crept stealthily, with a sullen reluctance. The day had been too near akin for her to quarrel with it. The darkness and the white mist rose together out of the sodden earth.

II

The church was the first building on that side of the village: huddled against it was the priest's house, old enough, but with no grace of age: merely ugly instead of being picturesque: small, but comfortless.

No light showed in it, for it was empty. He had an ancient, dismal housekeeper, but she had gone to bury her sister at Issoudun.

He opened the ugly little wicket, and passed, in half a dozen paces, through the ugly little square garden,

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bisected, at all events neatly, by the flagged and broken path. He tried every year to make flowers grow there, but they were disobliging, and the wind was stronger than he.

Inside there was no fire, and only the acrid smell of the wood-fuel. He did not wait to light it, but passed at once into the church. He had always done this, all these years. Having only one Friend, he had need of never neglecting Him.

Sometimes he had really felt there, in spite of physical cold, bodily weariness, and fatigue of spirit, a sensible welcome. Often he had been used to stay there very long, till it would not have surprised him if his only Friend had come to him visibly out of the silent tabernacle and greeted him; that patient Presence had been as actual to him as if it had been tangible also.

That was why he had never gone mad: so he told himself on the rare occasions of specially poignant revolt against his isolation.

But to-night that comfort would not come. The church was as empty as the weald outside: as voiceless, except for the wind that rattled the shingles of the roof—like Death clattering his rosary. There was no sense of another Presence to warm the chill, to fill the void, to conquer the underlying silence that mere noises accentuated. To-night he was alone, even in the church. There was no one else.

He declared to himself that there was: he made an Act of Faith, but it was a barren essay of volition only. A blank discharge of words. His faith had been assailed before, often; as every most sincere believer's has been. That, however, had been simply temptation, an assault from without: a mere insolence, that faith, seated in placid confidence, had repelled. But this was different: faith was away. He called to her, but she was past out of hearing. He declared, aloud, that he believed—but such declaration was, he knew, simply untrue at present.

The tabernacle, in spite of all his protestations, contained to-night no living Friend and august Master, but simply a white symbol that he himself had consecrated. Inside the church it was dark; even outside the early night had fallen. A very faint glimmer fell from the lamp

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hung before the altar. In many churches the lamp is red, in his the rubric was followed, and it was of plain uncoloured glass, so that there was shed by it not even the mockery of warmth that a red light gives in a chill place. He had tended this lamp himself all these years, and it had never once gone out.

It went out now, as one might say, deliberately, without any warning flicker, as if—which was not, he knew, the case—the oil had been used up. The church was very dark; absolutely dark at first; then slowly each window began to grow out of the blackness. Nothing was visible in the church; and the curé sat alone in the pitch darkness, bitterly cold. He had risen from his knees, and that was all he felt—freezing inwardly. It seemed to him that he remained a long while, staring miserably into the dark, trying to cudgel out of his heart some genuine motion of faith; trying even to make by heart some profession of belief. It was horrible to be quite alone. There had only been that One: inaudible, invisible, but still *there*. Now there was no one.

Presently he got up and groped his way easily—after twenty years it was familiar—to the sacristy, where there were candles and matches. Mechanically he lighted one, put on a surplice and stole, and, with the key of the tabernacle, went back into the church and mounted the steps of the altar. Out of merest mechanical habit he lighted two of the candles there; then opened the tabernacle. There was the ciborium, a poor one of somewhat tarnished copper-gilt, with silver cup. There was the lunette. Both were empty. Had he expected to find them so? He could scarcely tell, he was too cold. His faith, perhaps, was merely frozen, as his senses were freezing, and his very consciousness.

He blew out the tall candles; the tabernacle was closed again; and with the other candle he made his way back to the sacristy. His step was unlike itself, wavering a little. And the flickering light in his hand, blown by the draught, flung odd shadows. They seemed to huddle into corners and to hide behind pillars, even to slip out and follow him.

Presently he heard a footstep, unmistakably. Loud was the noise and rattle of the wind, but as to the sound

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of some one walking in the church there could be no possibility of deception. It was no mere echo, for he himself stood still, but the footfall did not cease. He was a courageous man, and there was nothing to fear. Certainly no robber would be tempted to such a place. All the same a chill misgiving seized him, and grew strongly.

The footsteps were those of a man, firm and rather swift. They were in the middle aisle, and they moved in the direction of the big west door, which was locked.

The curé followed them: they ceased at the door, and he heard withdrawing of bolts, the turning of the key in the lock. Then he came himself to the door, and his light fell on a figure. The back was turned to him, nevertheless he knew that it was familiar and knew that he had never seen it before—the Most Beautiful of the Children of Men; taller, by the head upwards, than all the people. A young man, in the perfection of manhood. One hand was raised aloft to the topmost bolt, and bore a strange scar upon it, visible in the wavering light of the curé's guttering candle. Still He did not turn, and the priest stood behind watching Him. Unmistakably the dress was that of a poor man, nevertheless, conscious authority was expressed in every line, authority inherited, inborn, and inalienable.

The door swung open, and one could see a new watery moon just risen, or just disclosed by new-drawn curtains of ragged cloud.

He who had opened the door turned round then, and their eyes met.

"I was going," He said.

The curé attempted no question, but watched still the well-known features never seen till now.

"I have stayed for you only," said the familiar stranger.

He turned again to go, and the priest moved forward slowly, just to watch Him to the last. There was a terrible patience in his attitude, his head a little bent, the guttering candle in his thin, cold fingers. He did not say anything even now—not even "Come back!" A submission the more poignant that it was dumb seemed personified in his patient, poor figure.

The Other stopped, looked back, and again their eyes

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met. This time neither spoke, but He Who had been going pointed up the dark church towards the altar, and the curé looked thither. The strangely scarred Hand continued to point through the darkness to the unseen altar, which was black too. Was it a command?

The curé moved a little in the direction whither the scarred Hand pointed: It pointed still, and he obeyed Its mandate, though this parted them. When last he noted the Face that watched him, a gentleness, that was like a grave, kind smile, had lighted it.

At the altar, by what impulse he did not ask himself, he lighted again the two candles, and again opened the tabernacle.

It was no longer empty, and the lamp that hung before it out of the darkness of the roof flung down its yellow light again.

Outside, the cold moon shone clear; he turned to look, but, though the big west door stood open still, it framed no figure.

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"BRAT"

THE BEGINNING OF A HERO

I

"WHO'S yer 'atter?" demanded the boy, running his words together, and oblivious of aspirates.

He was not really a pleasant boy, and though his interest in the gentleman's headgear might, from one point of view, seem flattering, it was not conveyed in an agreeable manner.

"Who's yer 'atter?" he demanded, pointing derisively at the shiny object of his inquiry.

It is doubtful whether he expected any satisfaction of his curiosity; on the whole, I am inclined to think he did not. He had constantly displayed the same desire for information in reference to the head-covering of other gentlemen to whom he had never been introduced, and had never previously been given the required information. They had, indeed, generally hurried away as though his questions were painful to them. But on the present occasion he was answered by the unusually gorgeous young passenger whom he had addressed.

"I do not," replied the gentleman, "employ a ratter. But if, as I think probable, your flattering inquiry in reality bears reference to my hatters, I have much pleasure in assuring you that they are Messrs. Lincoln and Bennett."

He lifted, as he spoke, the beautiful glossy hat from his head, and, adjusting more carefully his eyeglass, glanced into its interior, as if to assure himself of the accuracy of his statement.

"Their address," he added, restoring the hat to its former position, "is a London one. At the corner of

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Sackville Street and Piccadilly you will find the establishment."

He did not cease to stare with great fixity at his youthful interrogator, who, though he had often himself employed the same tactics, did not now find the process at all agreeable. He began to move slowly again, whistling gently, and affecting a sudden absent-mindedness, as though he had forgotten the proximity of the gentleman.

But the gentleman had not finished his conversation; the boy with the basket had begun it; it seemed to Mr. Treville that it was his own prerogative to close it.

"May I," he continued, "assure them of your custom? I feel sure you will find them an improvement."

Again adjusting his glass, the young man surveyed, with an air that was certainly critical, the amorphous cap with which his young friend's unkempt locks were crowned, rather than covered.

The unpleasant boy did not like it.

"'Ope you'll recognize me again, when yer sees me!" he ejaculated, rather savagely.

"I hope I shall," Mr. Treville responded, with great sweetness. "Should I appear not to do so, you will, I am sure, not attribute it to intentional discourtesy."

The boy with the basket cleared his throat, an unpleasant habit, it is true; but at that period many of his habits were objectionable.

It is perhaps as well to state that he was on foot. Mr. Treville, on the other hand, was on horseback. He walked his horse close to the footpath, and the boy with the basket trailed alongside him.

Suddenly the younger of the two (it is easy to identify him, for he was also the dirtier, and the raggeder) looked up and ejaculated, rudely—

"*Ain't* you darned funny, just? I expect you're the chap as makes the jokes to go in the funny papers. 'Ow many jokes did the 'ire of that gee cost yer?"

"My horse," replied the unembarrassed gentleman, "is my own. I am not on the staff of a comic paper. That accounts for my being, as you kindly say, so amusing. I am a schoolmaster."

The boy with the basket took another look at him.

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"Ananias!" he remarked, disconnectedly, understanding, perhaps, the bearing of his allusion, but probably ignorant of its being one.

"My pupils," added the equestrian, "do not pay me."

"Yer runs a board-school—eh?"

"No. My school is the world. My pupils I find everywhere. It is my object to teach them what they most require. I have endeavoured to teach you. I think, having done so, I will wish you good morning. You'll remember the address, won't you? Ah, yes, and you'll mention to Messrs. Lincoln and Bennett that I introduced you?"

He again raised the product of their art from his handsome head for a moment of polite greeting, and trotted gently on.

The boy looked after him, rather wistfully.

"'E's a luniac, 'e is," he soliloquized. "'E's no business to be at large. 'E's a menniss to Society."

Again his eyes travelled down the dusty, sunlit suburban road, and he wished the gentleman had not gone.

"Hi!" he yelled—"hi!" and he shouted with his hands outspread on either side of his mouth. The gentleman looked over his shoulder, turned, and came back. The boy looked dubiously on either hand, as if considering flight.

"Well," inquired the gentleman, "what is it?"

The boy scraped with his shabby feet in the deep dust of the road. A sudden, wild desire was working within him to tell the smart, rich gentleman on the splendid horse that never before in all his poor, squalid life had any one spoken to him as if with interest. And the lad was keen to note, beneath all the odd cynicism of the young man's eccentric speech, that, for some reason, he did take an interest in the brat. As he looked down the young man watched him, with, I think, some appreciation of what was passing in the wild, arab mind.

"Shall I tell yer why I called yer back?"

"If you please."

The boy gave a hurried glance behind himself, and again prepared to flee.

"Well," he said with a burst of confidence, "it was

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to arst yer how far you would have got if I had not called yer back."

"After all, I am not so funny as you are," observed the young man, impassionately.

It was a very mild retort, but it did not please the boy with the basket. He reddened a little, and again began to whistle unconcernedly.

The gentleman was playing with the riding-crop he carried; it had a crooked handle that quite suddenly wound itself into a convenient hole in the boy's ragged coat.

"Come," said Mr. Treville, "you asked me how far I should have got if you had not called me back. I will show you."

And, before he could resist, the boy was being hurried along the dusty road at a smart trot. The road went uphill, and he disliked the process extremely. At the end of three or four hundred yards his captor pulled up.

"I fancy," he said, "that, had you not called me back, I should have got about as far as this. Good-bye, brat," he added, and rode away, to come back no more. The boy glanced ruefully after him, but had no breath to spare to call "Hi!" after him this time.

II

We next meet our friend of the basket in what are called equivocal circumstances. The scene is a magistrate's court, the time forenoon, the cause of his presence there, compromising.

"The lad is young, and he seems intelligent," observed the magistrate. "It is a pity to send him to gaol. It is a pity there is no one to come forward on his behalf."

There was some movement just then near the door, and it was understood some one was, in fact, about to "come forward" on the lad's behalf.

The appearance of the gentleman who came forward excited some surprise. It was ordinarily rather a dingy gentleman who went bail on these occasions, neither young nor smart, but grizzled, sombre, spectacled, and austere.

A very tall and very handsome young gentleman, of

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unmistakably "fashionable appearance,"—of what, indeed, is popularly supposed to be a worldly appearance—stepped forward, and was understood to profess his willingness to take charge of the boy.

The magistrate peered over his spectacles (as he generally did when desirous of a good view) at the young aristocrat—for such he undoubtedly was—and asked, with some curiosity, if he had been informed of the nature of the lad's offence.

"Yes; but I do not believe he really meant to steal."

The magistrate looked incredulous; the head constable smiled, and hurriedly wiped the smile away with his cuff.

"I mean," pursued the gentleman, "that I do not believe stealing was his object. I have met that lad before, and I fancy, if he really meant to steal, he would have gone for something more saleable and more valuable than a cotton bandana handkerchief."

The magistrate turned his gaze on the culprit, and seemed to be weighing the proposition.

"His object, I think," added the gentleman, "was to be arrested. It has been a very hard winter, and there is a great deal of suffering. I fancy he chose his moment with some care, when that officer," with a nod at the constable who had smiled, "happened, by fortunate chance, to be looking."

The magistrate had a twinkling, humorous eye, and he rather liked this queer young man. To tell the truth, he rather liked the prisoner, too. The business was soon arranged.

Outside the police court a cab was waiting.

"Hop in!" remarked Treville.

And the lad hopped in. Another young gentleman, who seemed to watch the proceeding with some amusement was sitting in a private hansom drawn up just behind the cab. Mr. Treville prepared to join him.

"Where to, sir?" asked the cabman.

"To the Mension 'Ouse—private hentrance," remarked the lad, answering for himself, and leaning back with an imperial manner.

"Sure yer don't mean Buck'n'am Palliss?" demanded the cabby, who knew the circumstances.

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"Try 'n 'ide yer ignorance, cabby!" retorted the imp. "Royal Fem'ly's all out o' town."

Mr. Treville and his friend laughed; the cabby made a remark that is seldom printed in full.

The brat leaned out of the window, and addressed a brief observation to Mr. Treville's coachman.

"'Ome," he said, with great dignity—"to 'Anwell."

Mr. Treville's friend laughed again.

"All right, home," said Mr. Treville.

And the hansom drove off, followed by the cab, but in the direction, not of Hanwell, but of Knightsbridge.

Mr. Treville lived, it appeared, in a well-known barracks in that neighbourhood.

III

A very different scene.

The land of the Pharaohs—the panting desert, the cloudless, rainless, sandy waste. A low horizon, ending in mirage, where pale, hot sand and pale, hot sky meet and mingle.

A few miles to the east the waterway that cuts the ancient camel-track from Syria into Egypt, by which Joseph came into the land over which he was to be Emir, by which that other Joseph came flying from the barbarous cruelty of the king who warred against a Child, bringing with him "the young Child and His mother."

Nearer the "Sweet-water Canal," out of which the troops drank, fringed with a few windy tamarisks. Over all the throbbing haze of the desert, so like an ocean, with its rolling, brown billows, treeless, houseless, void.

Out of sight, cowering among the sand-waves, a ruined mosque, of the colour, nay, of the material, of the desert, and called Zagara, and so furnishing a name for the skirmish of that day—the smallest, but the most brilliant engagement of the first campaign.

A very tall and very handsome officer comes to the tent-door; a soldier is "soldiering" accoutrements just outside. The morning has just a touch of freshness; it puts ardour into every one.

"Well, Brat," says the officer, "they say we shall fight them to-day."

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The soldier is also an old friend, the "unpleasant boy" who was so inquisitive, on a former occasion, as to his present master's hatters.

He is twenty-one years old now—taller, broader, finer-looking, but still with the same unconquerably "cheeky" face.

He looks away in the direction where the enemy is supposed to be, and he rubs his nose meditatively with a button-brush.

"I wonder," he says, with a queer expression in his eyes, as he darts a swift glance at his master, "whether you'll manage to get killed? You'll do your best."

He spat defiantly upon a recalcitrant spot and scrubbed it spitefully.

Mr. Treville laughed and made no response. He was looking away over the eastern desert.

"That way lies the Holy Land," he remarked, presently. "It seems so near." He was scarcely speaking to the soldier; a dreamy, very unusual look was in his eyes.

The soldier watched him savagely. He hated him to look like that.

"Perhaps," said the young officer, suddenly bringing his glance home, and looking into the "Brat's" eyes straight, "you are right. There are many things that I may know to-night."

"Dry it up!" cried the soldier, in defiance of every regulation as to the correct method of addressing an officer.

Three hours afterwards the battle joined. It was very brief, very brilliant, and a victory.

In its thick Treville was wounded. He knew, at once, he had been right. As he sank to his knees the horizon gathered in; he should never again see the mirage, nor any foolish mirage of this silly world of ours. He had some water in his flask, and he was able, even now, to open it and hold it out to a soldier dying close at hand. He could not see who it was—his sight was already dim.

Wounded mortally, with so brief space of life, he seemed likely to live longer than a wounded foe at hand thought fit. The Arab was not badly hurt, but in the knee, so that he could not fight. He raised himself with

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eagerness, with horrible difficulty, and staggered for once again to his feet, poised his weapon, and, with wicked force, drove it down; but across the crouched and crumpled body of the dying officer, the dying soldier flung himself, with one supreme effort, and in his own body the man received the thrust. The Arab was mowed down instantly, the weapon drawn out, but it made little difference.

"Was that you, Brat?" stammered the officer, whose speech came halting now.

"Yes, master! I am going with you."

"To meet our Friend."

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THE MOTI MAHÁL MYSTERY

I

I HAD always heard that the Rajah of Sudapore was a very intelligent young man, and when I made his acquaintance I found that report had spoken truly. He was, of course, a Hindu, but without a great many of the much later superstitions engrafted by the Brahmins on the Shastas.

As unfortunately often happens, in learning to discard these absurdities he had learned nothing better in their place, and the youthful prince was a bit of a freethinker—from a Hindu point of view, at all events.

One day, after I had grown fairly intimate with him, I asked the Rajah if he had any objection to telling me the true story of the famous Moti Mahál, whose loss some years before had made a great stir at the time.

Perhaps I may as well remind my readers that Moti Mahál means in Hindustani "Pearl of the Palace," and was the name given to one of the crown jewels of Sudapore. This was an immense pearl, by far the largest, it was said, in India, and probably in the world. It was, as is usual in India, uncut and irregular in shape, but resembling roughly in form a guinea-fowl's egg, which, however, it exceeded in size.

The gem had belonged to the reigning dynasty before their conquest of Sudapore—for they were Mahrattas, and had dethroned the original Rajput line, a circumstance of great rarity (for the Rajputs are themselves a conquering race), and a circumstance that had never been forgotten. The branch of the house of Sivaji enthroned among the hills round Sudapore had ever ruled rather by strength of arm than force of affection or popularity.

"Well," said the young prince, "the Moti Mahál was

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certainly stolen, and though a report was industriously circulated at the time that the thief was of the Angresi my father never believed it. None of the Sahiblog knew the secret of its hiding-place, for it was not kept with the other Crown jewels in the Palace Treasury. My father always felt convinced the theft was the work of a native. There was a whisper that it had been stolen to aid in providing funds for a revolution in favour of a Rajput pretender, but that is very unlikely. At any rate, there was no such attempt made, though it may have been wished for, and, as the pearl never came into the market, it does not seem that any money could have been forthcoming by its means."

"Might it not have been sold or pledged to some one rich enough to wait, or might it not have been cut up?"

"It might have been cut up, but no one anywhere in the world could have suddenly appeared possessed of such a gem without its true ownership being instantly proclaimed."

"If it were cut in the European manner?"

"Even then it would certainly be identified, unless its size were largely sacrificed for the sake of security of possession, which though possible is unlikely. We believe it is still in India; perhaps it will be found some day."

The young Rajah told me several circumstances in connection with the disappearance of the pearl that seemed to me to open up possible clues to its recovery. To avoid wearying you by their repetition at length, I will here state that on following them up I found them all end in greater mystification than ever.

II

Two miles or so from the city gates, on the banks of the sacred though otherwise unimportant river Krishna, stands a temple of the Goddess Devi much venerated by the Rajput subjects of my acquaintance. It was built in fulfilment of a vow by the last ruler of the late Rajput Royal family, and partly for that reason, chiefly for another, had never been the object of much devotion on the part of the actually reigning house. That second reason was that the image of the goddess in the shrine

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was believed by the native Rajputs to be miraculous, and to have the habit from time to time of prophesying more or less plainly the downfall of the invaders' rule.

For some time, perhaps in consequence of a hint from the palace of certain very definite results likely to ensue from too free an indulgence in this proclivity, the goddess had held her tongue; or, if she had breathed sedition, she had done so in privacy to the most approved adherents of the late Royal family, and on occasions little likely to come to the ears of the palace.

The temple itself was much like other Hindu shrines of the sort; built upon the steep ghauts of the river, and overhung by ancient peepul trees, it reared its square front and carven minar in dusky redness against the pale faintness of the weary, cloudless sky. Countless monkeys played and gabbled among its courts and cloisters, and through the branches of the sacred trees darted numberless silvery squirrels.

. . . . .

"They say Devi has begun her prophecies again."

My informant was Captain Remington of the detachment (for though I tell this tale it must not be supposed we were stationed at Sudapore itself; the cantonment is at Jalwar, situated about as far from the native city as Mhow is from Holkar's palace at Indore. But Sudapore is less than a third of the size of Indore, and though there was once a biggish garrison at Jalwar it is a very small one now—a regiment of native infantry and two companies of some British regiment. "Devi has started prophesying again," observed Captain Remington of the detachment.

"H'm. I fancy His Highness will make her prophesy to order, or send an intimation that she had better let it alone altogether."

"They say the Rajputs are secretly much excited about it; but they are sitting tight and watching how the wind blows."

"I expect they have some rotten notion that the Sahiblog are privately in favour of the rebellion."

"They little know His Highness has promised us a contingent."

I pondered over this news. When I was dressing for

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mess my bearer repeated it to me. He was not a Rajput, and seemed to take no personal interest in the renewed loquacity of the Divine Lady, though he was a Hindu, and doubtless, after his fashion, believed the Shastas. But as a piece of local gossip of some political significance he took a lively interest in the intelligence.

A few nights later I had been dining with the Resident, whose bungalow was on the side of Sudapore furthest from the Jalwar cantonment, and, of course, drove back. But I noticed almost at once that the tatti was going horribly lame, and, on examination, found that he had been badly shod, so that the poor beast cut his off hind fetlock every moment with the near hind shoe.

Jumping down to examine the mischief I decided that it was necessary to walk him home, so I did not get in again, but told the sais to walk the horse slowly home, and set off to tramp it myself.

It was a glorious night, cool considering, and with a soft breath of wind. There was no moon, but the stars gave out their mild tropic radiance, and in and out of the boughs of the banyan trees and fragrant cork flowers flickered the myriad tapers of the fireflies.

It was pretty late by the time I was abreast of the Temple of Devi that has already been described, and I was a good deal surprised to see a light shining out of it. The temple caps a mound to the right of the road, the river lying down beyond it out of sight.

There was something uncanny about this light, it was so pale and soft, and my curiosity was whetted. I guessed it had something to say to the renewed talkativeness of the tutelary deity, who appeared to share the proverbial inability of her sex to remain long silent.

So I turned aside, and very softly stole up the mound to the temple. The short grass made this very easy, and even in the actual court of the temple there was so deep a layer of sand that no effort was required to walk wholly without sound.

Peering in out of the surrounding darkness the temple looked mysterious enough, lighted dimly with that pale phosphorescent glimmer; at the back, almost in darkness, stood the grim and hideous image of the foul and cruel goddess, looming much larger than life, painted scarlet,

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with a necklace of very lifelike skulls about her throat—if one may describe death's heads as lifelike.

Just within the temple knelt, or rather cowered, an old Hindu, his back, of course, turned to me. But I thought there was something familiar about his figure, and I watched him with considerable interest; his back was rather expressive, and intense dread seemed to be the chief emotion expressed.

A hollow voice slowly broke the midnight silence of the lonely shrine—a voice that to me suggested pebbles in the mouth of the speaker, but doubtless was very unearthly to the devout listener to whom it was really addressed.

It indubitably did proceed from the mouth of the image, which I noticed had lips slightly apart; the pale light so flickered that the lips might well appear to move as their shadows altered from moment to moment.

Nor was the tenour of the divine lady's remarks calculated to encourage the trembling devotee. She reproached and she threatened roundly. Even I felt it preferable to assist at such maledictions as a third party only. I had been listening a very short time, however, before I became aware that the purport of these remarks was extremely interesting. It was easy to gather that the listener had been far from zealous in a political movement that the goddess had much at heart. And particularly he was abused for the parsimony that had prevented him from assisting with money what he was too cowardly to help with his own active assistance. At this point the denunciations became really blood-curdling, and the old man fell to whimpering.

He pleaded poverty, but the goddess knew better. There was that in his possession, she hinted, that would do better than many lakhs of actual rupees.

"And it is Devi's," snarled the goddess, "for it was stolen by the great-grandfather of that usurper from my temple at Kirkee, and I will curse all who keep it from me until it lies again upon my breast. I, Devi, wife of Siva, saw thee steal it from the hidden place where the usurper kept it, and I suffered thee, for I thought that in piety thou didst it to restore it to me, the Destroyer Queen, or, at least, to give it to the aid of them that would drive hence the usurper,"

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Her language then grew most unladylike, and she entered into the grossest particulars as to the precise form her vengeance would take if the Pearl of the Palace were withheld longer from her keeping. It concluded in a demand that the gem should be handed over to her in that place on the following night at an hour still later than the present. If he failed, then would she, Devi, the wife of Siva the Destroyer, denounce him to the usurper himself, and would in other ways also render herself exceptionally objectionable; but she insisted a good deal on her intention to show him up to the Rajah if he played her false.

Then the light slowly died, but not before I had caught one glimpse of the old gentleman's side face as he rose to his feet. I knew that elderly rascal well.

Out went the light, out came the trembling devotee and crept away down the slope of the mound, taking the road back to the city as swiftly as he knew how. For myself, I sat tight in my dark corner, and not without my reward. After ten minutes or so the light rekindled, and, peering in, I saw a trapdoor rise from the floor of the temple almost immediately in front of the image, and from the trapdoor emerged the figure of a youthful Brahmin, whom I knew very well by sight and a little to talk to. He bore a bad character, being said to care little for his religion and a great deal too much for political intrigues. Shutting down the trap, he swept the sand back over it with his foot and scattered more out of a bag he had round his waist. Then he went and stood in front of the image, which he saluted half mockingly, and blew straight into her eyes, when the pale and ghastly light finally died out.

III

Betimes next day I was with the Rajah, and told him of a little scheme I had, in which I ventured to ask for the personal assistance of His Highness himself. This was not refused me, and we kept our own counsel, desiring no other help.

At midnight we met, and took our devious path to the lonely temple of the seditious goddess. I had a

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revolver, and so had he; but we looked forward to no need for them, or for the kukri His Highness wore hidden in the folds of his kamarband.

I felt a little ashamed of myself, inasmuch as we were conspirators, though in a lawful cause, but he was Oriental enough to be free from any such weakness. And as there was no intention of wounding the Brahmin, he did not see anything mean in our being two to one.

On the contrary, he pointed out that in no other way could we have hoped to succeed without a fierce tussle, in which there would no doubt have been real risk of bloodshed, and even loss of life. It was a very dark night, there was still no moon, and the sky was less clear and starlit than it had been the night before. Among the low bushes round the temple we waited in absolute silence, and the time so spent seemed endless. Nevertheless, like all earthly things, it came to an end at last. Out of the blackness, a slim, white-clad form defined itself, and came with swift and noiseless gliding motion across the open court, and, so, close to where we stood. The instant he had passed, we had caught him, a many-folded chudder had been flung over his head, and he was very effectually gagged. To that, however, we durst not trust, in case of his by some luckless chance getting his mouth free just when it would be of deepest consequence for him to give no sound.

So a sleeping-injection was given with a hypodermic syringe, that acted beautifully, and not very much too soon. The Rajah slipped into the temple, and soon the spot in the floor was found covering the trap; it was a little more difficult to find the manner of opening it, but that also was done at last; then down a narrow stair I saw him vanish. Very shortly afterwards, the pale nightlight glimmer shone out through the blue eyes of the goddess.

It seemed an age before that other form came creeping out of the darkness and the trembling devotee drew near.

"Son, I know well how thou hast hesitated all this day, and turned in thy mind if thou couldst not cheat me of thy promise" (the old man shivered at this address), "and even now thou wouldst fain go back of thy word."

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Then followed a string of threats that would really not have disgraced Devi herself. They grew and gathered in intensity, like a storm rising on a rock-bound shore, until I did not wonder to hear the old reprobate to whom they were addressed whimpering.

Then a hollow silence fell on the temple, and suddenly the light was extinguished, whereat the culprit let out a little shriek of terror; he had clearly no fancy for being alone with Devi in the pitch dark. The hollow voice from the image then spoke again, bidding him place in her lap the stolen gem, and with unutterable shrinking did the thief draw timidly near to obey her. Again the pallid light shone out, but only for a moment or two, and then died out.

"Meet me here again by daylight to-morrow at the hour before sunset," commanded the goddess; "and now begone."

This final behest was obeyed with great alacrity, and down the slope we heard him scuttle. If he had not been in such a hurry he might have heard a low ripple of laughter come through the lips of the Divine Devi, echoed by similar sounds outside from the lips that did not even claim divinity.

"Is it really the Pearl of the Palace?" I asked.

"It is Moti Mahál. Is it not well named? Did you ever imagine such a royal jewel, so soft, so glorious, and so unobtrusive? I owe half at least of it to you. The gem can never be divided, but its value can."

And that was how the Pearl of the Palace was brought back to the palace of His Highness, the Rajah of Sudapore.

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THE UNINVITED GUEST

A LEGEND

"Wheresoever pity shares
Its bread with sorrow, want, and sin,
And love the beggar's feast prepares,
The Uninvited Guest comes in.

"Unheard, because our ears are dull,
Unseen, because our eyes are dim,
He walks our earth, the Wonderful,
And all good deeds are done to Him."

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

I

A FLAT road *pavée*, almost straight for miles, on either hand the marshes. At wide intervals a hut, at intervals much wider a bleak village, visible a league away by reason of the dead level of the country. Along the road, poplars, like gaunt sentries, with no growth on one side, for the prevailing wind turns everything to the west. In summer a miasmic heat hangs over the marshes, now (in midwinter) a bitter, bitter cold creeps stealthily out of them.

A thin white fog rises among the pools and swamps to right and left, but rises no higher than the knees. The horizon is clear, far, far away to north and east and west; southward it is nearer, where a low hill is topped with sombre pines.

Along the road with stooping shoulders trudges the priest, M. le Curé of Brec-le-Marais. A man of any age you like, shabby, not newly shaven, very poor. He has been reading his office, until the pale light failed; and the Breviary is worn and thumbed; the one he had when he was made Sub-deacon.

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His soutane is patched, and hardly any longer black; very threadbare the long French coat reaching nearly down to the heels, and drawn close against the biting wind. Many of the white beads are missing from the rabat, most of the pile is missing from the battered tricorn.

Out of the distance the noise of swift wheels forms itself, and after five minutes M. le Comte is driven past. He nods perhaps to M. le Curé, but so slightly that the near-sighted priest does not see it; then he is carried away along the ugly road.

After all he is only a stranger. When the priest came here first, about ten years ago, it was a different family at the château; the old de Brecs, who had been there since the Fronde. But Madame la Comtesse died six years ago, and monsieur the year after; the sons are in the navy and diplomacy, and they have sold Château le Brec. No longer does the curé dine there twice a week; there is no countess now to make woollen things for his poor, and listen to the village children being catechized.

These new people are very rich, and come from nowhere; no one ever heard of them. They are very smart, and M. le Curé is too shabby for them. The priest sighs gently, and draws his worn-out coat closer against the searching wind.

What has all his work of ten long, long years come to after all? Who is any better? Are not some already worse? Whom has he gained? Whom has he not perhaps even lost?

If he had not been a priest, if he had stayed at home in the dear Touraine, at their old château (for he too was noble), and been as his honest brothers, would any one have been the worse? And would he himself not have done as much good?

Someone, having, as it would seem, dropped from the dull sky, is walking behind him, wearily also, towards the village—a traveller, burdened and footsore. Very often as he goes his eyes follow the poor priest, and at last he calls out to him.

"Friend, shall we walk together, seeing we are going the same way?"

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The priest stood still and let the other come up with him. He was indifferent whether he walked alone or with a stranger. He would have liked to have a friend to bear him company.

"You seem tired," said the stranger.

"I am weary."

For a time they trudged on silently; then the poor traveller paused to ease his burden.

"It seems heavy," said the priest.

The stranger sighed; it was in sooth a load that he carried.

"Let us carry it together," said the priest, and they got it between them on the stranger's staff. It was very heavy.

"I get help like this sometimes," said the poor traveller, "seldom when I crave it; but now and then it is given unoffered."

The low gray sky stooped over the marshes, and the bitter wind bent the reeds and roughened the stagnant pools; the sickly day was dying out.

II

When they came to the village the traveller made as though he had to go farther, and the priest did not constrain him to stay with him.

"Bon voyage," he said, and the traveller shouldered his pack and passed onward through the street.

The priest went in, and raked the dying fire together in his little stove; the cottage smelled of the burning peat. It was very poor, and the draught whistled through the shaking window.

He sat down, lighted his smoky lamp, and finished the office. He had never felt so full of discouragement before, though often the loneliness of his life in that village of the marshes had been a burden. The people were so dead of heart! None of them seemed better for his long labour—the old ones almost more grovelling than ever. How to live, how to snatch some wretched living out of the sodden earth—that was all their care. Had they any faith?—any hope? Where was their charity?

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The poor traveller had gone on towards the Auberge aux Marais, but it had guests—whence could any guests come to such a place?—and there was no room for him and his ugly bundle. But there was the little Auberge de la Porte St. Gautier; it was at the further exit of the town. But there was no room even there.

A knock came on the priest's door. He went to open it. Outside in the darkness stood the poor traveller.

"Your village is not hospitable—I can find no lodging," he said.

The priest shook his head.

"Come in, then." He too had found it inhospitable, and he had known it longer.

By the little stove they sat down, and the priest, bade his guest warm his numb fingers. He would not hold forth his hands, but kept them hidden in the folds of his thin raiment.

Perhaps they were soiled with his journey. The priest brought water and invited him to wash them. Then he saw that they were scarred.

"How were you wounded?" he asked.

Why was the man ashamed of the scars?

"I am ashamed," said the poor traveller, "because I was wounded thus by those of my own kindred; in the house of my friends."

"Nay," thought the priest, "he is off his head." And to this thought the poor traveller made answer:

"A long while ago they said that of me, calling me mad."

Then again they fell into silence, and one heard the whistling wind in the chinks of the casement.

"Have you far to travel, friend?"

"My journey is never ended. I have no home in any place; I am a stranger in all lands, they do not know my speech, and they bar the doors when I ask for housing."

"How have you injured them?"

"I have told them the truth."

"Ah," said the priest, "that is hateful."

"And my burden is heavy," said the traveller, "and none are willing—or very few—to help me to carry it."

"Why must you carry it? Who forces you? Have you any master?"

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"I am constrained by a ruthless master. He forces me. He lays on me the dire necessity of pain and labour."

"And his name?"

"Love," whispered the stranger.

The priest brought out his frugal fare and set it before his guest. He had never had a guest before in that poor cottage of the marshes, and the pleasantness of hospitality began to warm him. The bread seemed fresher and the milk richer—the light of the little lamp clearer and less obscured. As they sat he told the guest of his discouragement.

"How long have you laboured?" asked the poor traveller.

"For more than ten years."

"Have you gained any one?"

"Perhaps one for each year! And they are gone from me. Some dead, some gone away into the country."

"In thirty years I raised but three dead to life!" said the poor traveller.

And then the poor priest of the marshes knew his guest, who had joined him on the way, who had come to give him courage.

"I am going forward now," He said, "shall I take with Me all the burden?"

"Nay," said the priest, "I will carry some of it."

And part of the burden was left; with the rest the poor traveller went forward—as it seemed more lightly. And, having taken his share again, the priest felt lighter too.

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GIANLUCA

WHEN Charles V heard that Rhodes was lost to Christendom, the knights of St. John the Baptist having yielded it at last, with all the honours of war, to Sultan Solyman, he cried, "Lost, yes! But never before in this world was anything lost so nobly!" And when, five years after, he ceded the island of Malta in free fief to L'Isle Adam and his warrior-monks, the emperor knew that he was giving into their trust the key of Christendom. That key the Turk never snatched from them. Thankless Europe forgets to-day its unspeakable debt to the knights of the hospital, by whom for generations the Turkish fleets were held at bay in the Midland Sea. Many a Christian state and republic made truce and traffic with the Sultan; between Malta and Mahomet there was never peace.

When the English King, Charles II, had returned from exile three years, Nicholas Cottoner was elected Grand Master of Malta; and among the knights that swore obedience to him none had a sweeter repute than the lad Fra Gianluca dei Tancredi.

He was barely of age, and looked like a slim, tall boy, with his clear blue eyes and fair skin, and masses of shining brown hair. His father was Prince of Santa Chiara di Montechiara, among the network of mountains behind Taormina in Sicily. His mother's uncle was an old knight of the order who had once driven a Turkish galleon on the rocks of Capo Sant Andrea, and finding himself so near his niece's castle had gone ashore and made pilgrimage, up among the twisted valleys of those lonely hills, to visit her.

It was October, and the nights fell cold up there in the mountains. As they all sat, after supper, round the blazing logs in the huge stone hall of the castle, the old

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knight-hospitaller told many a strange tale of sea-fight and storm, while the wind moaned in the chimney, and the rain smacked at the windows.

Many an exclamation pointed the periods of Fra Paolo's stories, but Gianluca sat listening, silent, a light on his face brighter than that of any flicker from the fire into which he gazed.

"Sh, Zio," whispered the lad's mother in her uncle's ear, "I doubt you've done me an injury."

"What injury? I that would bring nothing but good fortune to this house of yours!"

She tugged at his shoulder where the great white cross was, and he followed her glance that was fixed on her youngest, best-beloved son.

"There?" the old hospitaller asked. "Injury there?"

Gianluca turned towards them, as one whose thought had been tangled far away, and smiled on his mother with the look his eyes ever had for her.

In the morning, when old Don Placido, the chaplain, said Mass in the chapel where once the Saracens had stabled their steeds, Fra Paolo served him. He was as devout as he was brave.

"But Gianluca always serves," the priest had said in the sacristy.

"We will serve together," said the knight. "But, Father, I would confess myself, for I must go to Communion, in thanksgiving for what our Lord did by our means yesterday."

Both servers knelt together to receive Our Lord, the old warrior of the Cross and the home-bred lad.

Before noon the knight bade farewell to go back to his ship.

"What shall I give you, Zio?" his niece asked him. "Perhaps this—it was our mother's, your sister's, and in it is a relic of San Giorgio, whom soldiers revere."

"Can you spare it, Lisa?"

"Better than what you will take," said the princess, between reproach and tenderness.

"Sh, Lisa! Riddles again?"

"Easy ones to guess, Zio. Tell him, Gianluca, you."

The lad came behind his mother and laid an arm about her shoulders.

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"Yes, Zio," he said, smiling. "She has given me also."

"Be plain," grunted the knight. "No time for all these smiling hints and puzzles—I'm poor at guessing."

"She suffers me to offer myself to the Order," Gianluca answered simply.

"It is a great gift," the old man said gently. "Have you weighed it, Lisa?"

"All night."

"Ah, but there will come many nights—long nights: with sobs of wind and tears of rain—Lisa, Lisa, I came here for no such kidnapping."

"I have never given aught yet—nothing that I missed," the lady answered. "If God would like this, He will have accepted something of my real own."

"And his father—Mario? What has he to say?"

"He has five sons; he says of each as he goes his way, 'I didn't ask them if they were for this life; but fetched them to it. Why should they ask me what way of it they'll take?' Or else, 'I gave the lad his life: a present doesn't belong to the giver, once it's given.'"

"He knows then—this about Gianluca?"

"Oh yes! 'Gianluca,' he declared, 'is bound to do something special; that's the way with those silent ones that never drop a hint. Because you would have it he was like to be a monk, I swore he'd be a soldier—to anger you; for if I never made you cross you'd have nothing to confess. And the boy is so dutiful he hits on this fashion of proving us both right.' You know your father's way, Gianluca."

Gianluca nodded, smilingly.

"His words," the boy said, "are like the skin of the orange, yellow and bitterish, but he's full of sweet juice."

Gianluca knew that even his mother, alone in the gaunt castle, would scarcely miss him more than his father who often plagued him and said, "Gianluca, you'd better be obedient now to make up for beginning by annoying us. With four lumping boys, your mother and I wanted a girl—and it was thoroughly understood that you were to be one. Wasn't it, Lisa? We had settled that you should be born on the fifteenth of August and be called Assunta, after your grandmother; and you turned up a day too soon, when we were all fasting, and it wasn't

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any one's feast at all—and smiled in our faces as if it was nothing to run counter to the plans of a whole family. Your grandmother could have slapped you—she had a marriage in her pocket for you, with Castelfranco's only son."

Well, well! we run on as if all this talk had happened yesterday, instead of two hundred and fifty years or so ago.

Anyway, Gianluca's parents did not stand between him and the call God had given him; and presently—before Christmas—he was gone. But his brother Carluccio had married in November and brought his wife home to the castle among the mountains. So that, as the years went by, there were voices younger than Gianluca's to be heard; and his name was not mentioned much, though his father often thought of him as he rode homewards up the slanting road in the black yellow light of evening, and his mother had him always in her heart. "Not as the world gives, give I to you," she heard a familiar voice saying in her ears. The world gives mean things to make us mean; God gives Himself; and when we try to give in turn to Him, we find the thing given is more our own than ever.

Lisa knew that the lad could not have been more with her had he stayed always at home. He was with her now in every phase of his short white life. She felt his pink baby fingers at her throat and on her cheek; she heard his first quaint childish talk; she saw him far more vividly than if he himself had been—a great tall lad—in the front room playing at her feet; that exquisite absence we call death could not have held him closer to her than this long absence that had grown out of his swift resolve to give his life for Christendom. She never upbraided him in her thoughts, as having acted on unconsidered impulse; the quick decision had been as natural and inevitable as the opening of a flower that in a moment does that to which it has been growing from the beginning.

The ship that took Gianluca away came to Catania: thither he rode with a serving man who was to bring back the horses. His father walked with him to the turn of the valley, where a spur of the mountain runs out and makes a corner, beyond which the road is out of sight of

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the castle. On the terrace, in a shaft of the sunrise, Lisa stood and watched them, waiting for the boy to turn about in his saddle and wave back to her. Many a time afterwards did she walk to the place, but always alone, save for Gianluca himself, whose footfall she could hear, not on the rough road, but in her faithful heart.

It was at sunrise of the day following his leaving home that Gianluca's ship unfurled her sails to a light breeze and stood out to sea: a morning all blue and gold. The huge bulk of Mongibello loomed up behind with a silver scarf about his hidden feet. Flights of flying fishes caught the sun and were seen, lost it and were gone, like tiny white spirits rising from this deep to bid Gianluca pray for those whose restless graves were there. For hours Mongibello was visible, falling to a tiny white pyramid . . . then Sicily was gone; never to be seen again by the eyes of the novice hospitaller.

It was morning again when they slid into the Grand Harbour of Malta, and all the bells were ringing for Mass. To hear Mass was Gianluca's first act in his new country; he heard it in the little chapel of the port, vowing silently the oblation of his little life to the great Lord Life-Giver, as the priest made oblation of the slight round thing that was to become, by the word of the Word that made it, the Maker Himself. "Make of this poor soul of mine something that shall be mine no more," Gianluca prayed. And his comrades, who had come down to meet and welcome him, brotherly, told each other afterwards that he seemed to them uplifted; not in body, but as though Christ had taken his spirit and drawn it higher than this noisy world.

Gianluca had much to learn, and his first years were busy. On the other hand, there was all the business of a soldier, drill and discipline, musketry, tactics, and all the science of war: on the one, all the work of the hospital. Part of the day was spent in military duty, part of it in attendance on the wounded and the sick. Many a rough soldier died more gently for the gentle presence of the novice-knight who knelt and sat beside him in that long ward of the huge hospital. There were men from his own Sicily, who loved to hear their own tongue from his lips, who received the last sacraments more perfectly

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because Gianluca had helped them to get ready. And there were Frenchmen, whose speech was not so easy to him at first, but whom he never failed to make understand, because tenderness and pity and sympathy know no idiom, but are written in eyes like his. Spaniards and Germans—all understood, because what he had to say was that he was their comrade and brother, and longed to comfort and to help.

Then there was the work of waiting; for the knights took in turn to serve the Grand Master at his dinner, as he himself had first served the poor and maimed who were his first guests.

And finally Gianluca knew that he was a religious, and there was all the science of religion to learn, wherein one must go up by steps.

Then came profession, and Gianluca was a vowed knight of the hospital, and his turn would come soon to go and draw against Islam the sword that was never to be mixed in any strife between Christian and Christian.

In all these days he often went again to pray in the little chapel of the port where he had heard his first Mass in Malta. He had a special tenderness and love for it—it was so small and simple, and so near the sea whence the *Crescent* must be driven. Often in the dark he would kneel there, among the little groups of Maltese peasants, who liked to get a smile from him as he rose from his knees to go away. As he prayed, leaning on the cross hilt of his upright sword, and the calm yellow light of sundown smote him on the hair, he looked like the knight Galahad. Not that the other lads had ever heard of Galahad; but they said as they trudged away home to their *casal* in the country, "That knight—it is like the blessing of a priest after his first Mass, when he smiles."

At last it was Gianluca's happy turn to go with a squadron that had to intercept a Turkish fleet. Even on his way down to the ship he made time to slip into his little chapel of the port. For the last time he knelt there, for the last time admired a picture there that he loved: it was of the death of the great Jesuit, Saint Francis Xavier, and a comrade of his own had painted it. Gianluca never suspected that Fra Saverio had taken *him* for model. Then he rose from his knees, smiling back

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on the country lads who looked up to catch the blessing of his smile, and turning away to go about his valiant business.

It was a morning all blue and gold like that on which he had left home, the sea all sapphire, the sky one dome of turquoise, and the sunlight on bastion and rock all pure golden.

At the harbour's mouth every vessel dipped her standard to the bronze Christ with lifted hand that blest.

"*Salva nos!*" whispered each knight, as he saluted the sacred image.

Southward turned the fleet, crowds watching it as it went, till it slid into the opal veil of distance. On that very afternoon they fell in with the Turkish squadron and forced it to a battle. That first fight of Gianluca's was a victory for the cross; three large ships were taken, and another sunk, many Turks were made prisoners, and a number of Christian slaves, working at the oar, were redeemed from bondage.

By the time of the evening, *Ave Maria*, the victory was gained, and Gianluca's first battle was over. It was his last battle also. He had fought, as all bore witness, most valiantly, and, what he would most care for, he had saved the life of the painter, Fra Saverio.

Saverio, scarcely wounded, knelt on the deck by Gianluca's side, supporting his head while the priest gave him Our Lord to hold him up, as He held Peter, in his journey over the summer sea.

"*Salva nos!*"

When the priest moved on, to give to others the sacraments Gianluca had just received, Saverio held him still.

"It has been a short battle," the dying hospitaller whispered. The wound in his breast did not hurt much, and the blood flowed mostly inward.

"Do you want anything?" Saverio asked him.

"The little chapel of the port—I should like to see it again." He closed his eyes as if to see it in fancy.

Many folk were gathered there praying for the success of the Christian arms, townspeople and peasants, many who had often seen Gianluca kneeling among them.

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Some said afterwards that they suddenly perceived him again among them, on the pavement, lying in the attitude of the saint in Fra Saverio's picture, with shining face turned towards the tabernacle. It was just for a moment and then it was gone.

"Ah!" one country lad whispered to another. "Our little knight! He has been here, and he will come again no more."

Lisa at home among the silent mountains saw him too. She had walked, as she often did at sundown, to the corner of the road whence he waved his last farewell; and as she drew near the place she had felt a sudden strange certainty that to-day she would meet him there. At the turning of the road she paused a moment, scarce daring to go round it and find her fancy a deceit. Then she moved bravely on and lifted her eyes. Yes, he was there. He stood in a white circle like a great Host; on his face a glory, and in his eyes a smile sweeter than all the smiles of his she remembered.

His lips had the old exquisite expression of love and gravity; under the mantle, with its great white cross, his armour shone like the light of an unclouded moon on deep water.

"Home already!" she cried. And her son smiled "Yes" at her.

Just a moment before Fra Saverio, seeing his friend's eyes opening gently, had whispered, "Have you been there—to the little chapel at the port?"

"Yes. And now, Home."

And Gianluca's eyes had shut again, like a sleepy child's.

When they opened, he had mounted higher than the Sicilian hills.

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AUNT MURIEL'S LOVE-LETTERS

When Miss Muriel Halifax died, her niece had been engaged to Robert Wingate for nearly seven years. The old lady had never liked to hear Janet talk about it, and it was, by tacit agreement, seldom spoken of between them. We all have our faults, and Miss Halifax had more than her share of the rather unlucky failing for others, of selfishness. She had had a great sorrow and a great disappointment in her own life, and hers had been one of those natures that misfortune only sours without softening. She herself had had her love-story, and in her case the course of true love had not run smooth. And the old maid grudged her niece what she herself had lost. Furthermore, Janet's marriage would have left her quite alone in the world, and therefore she would hear nothing of the subject.

"After all," said the girl to her lover, "she brought me up; and I owe her a great deal. We must wait and be patient, and perhaps some day she may take more kindly to the notion of my marriage."

But Robert Wingate was not very patient, and he fumed at the delay, as if old Miss Halifax was the sole cause of it.

There was in reality another reason. Janet had nothing, and Robert had only his earnings, which, though ample to make a single man more than comfortable, were not sufficient, insisted prudent Janet, for the support of a family.

But a few years before Miss Halifax died Robert received a very eligible offer of an appointment abroad, which would certainly have been ample provision for their modest needs.

It never occurred to him that Janet would make any

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difficulty about going abroad, and it was a bitter disappointment to him to find that she would not think of it.

"And leave poor old auntie! Dear Robert, you know it is impossible. But can you not accept the post and go out there at once? Whenever I am free I will follow you."

But, though in her heart of hearts he knew she was right, the young man was annoyed, and wrote at once, refusing the appointment altogether. And now Aunt Muriel was dead.

"Janet," the old maid said to her niece, a few days before her death, "come here, my dear; I want to make a sort of confession to you. I know you will forgive me, for you have a sweet and loving nature. But I cannot die without begging your pardon, for I have treated you unjustly. When your poor mother died so suddenly, and left you to me, I was not very grateful to her. But still I took you, though it was with a bad grace enough."

"Dear auntie," said the girl, "you have been very good to me."

"I thought I was being very good then. But we are, I see now, expected to do more than just give bread and clothing; I have been very selfish. Your engagement made me think of my own disappointed life, and I grudged you your happiness, and would not help you to it. And more, I have, I am afraid, deceived you. Naturally, as I have no other kith or kin, you have always supposed that when I died you would have all that was mine. But the truth is, just before your mother died, I had sunk the little I possessed in the purchase of an annuity. That was all right; for an old maid like me it was the best and wisest thing to do. But I never told you, and have let you go on in the belief that some day you would have my income."

It was true that she had thus deceived Janet, but of any grievance of hers in the matter Janet now never thought. She knew Robert would be disappointed, that was all.

"All I can leave you," added the old lady, "is the little that I have saved—with interest and all, it comes to less than five hundred pounds—less than twenty-five

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pounds a year if you invest it—and this tiny cottage with its furniture."

It was indeed a tiny cottage, and the furniture was scanty and shabby; but still Janet thanked her aunt as gratefully as if it had been a mansion, and the old lady felt easier in her mind.

"I should like you, before you burn them up, to read through my old love-letters," she said, with a quiet smile. "They are in my bureau over there. You will find them sealed up together in a great packet. It is ten years since I opened it. You will feel, when you have read them, more compassion for my darkened life."

Janet promised, and once again assured her aunt that she felt nothing towards her but gratitude for the many kindnesses she had received at her hands.

Two days afterwards Miss Halifax died, and it was not till after the funeral that Janet told her lover of the very, very little her aunt had been able to leave her.

He took the news much more hardly than she had done.

"Then we are as far from marriage as ever," he cried, with bitter disappointment. "After seven years of waiting! Five hundred pounds and a doll's-house of a cottage! It does not together represent an increase of income of fifty pounds."

Then Robert tried a little false logic.

"We have nothing further to wait for," he declared. "Why wait any longer?"

But Janet only smiled at his impatience, and reminded him that just yet, at all events, there could be no talk of marriage, in her deep mourning.

That night Janet set about the sad task of reading the faded love-letters of the dead old maid. The bureau was an old Chippendale one, and was full of the scent of sandal-wood and cedar. In a carved box of the former she found the packet of letters, tied with black ribbon and sealed with black wax.

The letters extended over many years, beginning with 1847, and they came from many distant lands—for it soon appeared that their writer had been a sailor—and there were letters from India and Ceylon, from Mauritius, from the Cape and St. Helena, from South America,

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from Canada, British Columbia, the United States, British Guiana, and a score of other places.

They were very long, as a rule, and very sweet and loving, full of unmistakable truth and tenderness, and breathing always the same hope of their happy marriage in good time. "With this I send you, dear, a carved box," or "I bought you, the other day, a curious jewel from a native dealer, but have at present no means to send it."

In another letter he says: "I am amused to hear of your young sister" (Janet's mother) "making a collection of stamps, and in future will stick on to my letters specimens of all the values I can find. If she wants clean ones, I will send them inside my letters. I wish my presents for you were as easily sent."

The last letter of the series was the merriest of all. "In six weeks," it said, "I will again be at your side, and this time to claim you for my own. Now that it is finished, how short—nay, how happy—this time of waiting seems! And, after all, I am not yet thirty, and you four years younger. I think they who get married too swiftly lose half the joy of being lovers. In six weeks! I can scarce believe it." And in a postscript he adds: "I put in a number of the stamps of this place for Janet." Pinned to this letter was a folded cutting from a newspaper giving the account of the loss of the good ship *Hope* within sight of land and a week's sail of England. Among the list of those whose bodies had been recovered and identified was the name "Hubert Markham," that of the writer of the letters.

A note in a tremulous woman's hand, and faded ink, said how "the money I had saved towards my wedding finery I spent to place a cross of white marble on his distant grave."

The wind sobbed outside, and the rain beat against the window-pane; and Janet sat long looking into the red heart of the fire, and listening to the echoes of those two dead lovers' voices.

"Poor Aunt Muriel," she mused, "they have met at last."

And the gentle rain of her tears of womanly compassion fell softly for the dead.

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In various drawers of the old bureau she found most of the presents mentioned in the letters; and she found also an album of extracts, with quaint, stiff sketches, and dried bouquets of fern, and pressed flowers, and seaweed. On the title-page of this was elaborately illuminated (in the style of no known century), "Extracts and Miscellanies. Muriel Halifax."

In the same drawer was another album, with leaves of various colours filled with foreign and colonial postage-stamps, rather untidily stuck down, and announced, by a sprawling inscription on the fly-leaf, to be the property of Janet Halifax.

"They will please Robert," the girl said to herself, for the mania of stamp-collecting was, she was used to declare, his only weakness. To Janet, as to most people who are free of the fancy, stamp-collecting seemed an employment for schoolboys and schoolgirls.

All that night Janet's unselfish dreams were more haunted by the memory of her aunt's sad romance than by the thought of the difficulties lying in the way of her own happiness. Almost her last waking thought was of the dead sailor's saying, "I think they who get married too swiftly lose half the joy of being lovers."

The next morning was gloriously fine and fresh after the rain; a keen, wholesome autumn morning that made Janet feel light-hearted almost in spite of herself. It was a half-holiday, and after her early dinner Robert came to take her for a walk. She put the stamp-book into his hands with a laugh, saying that there was a toy for him.

"It seems that I ought to have inherited the taste from my mother," she added, "instead of its descending to her future son-in-law."

Robert's first glance at the stamps made him positively jump, and then for ten minutes he turned the pages over with eager excitement.

"My dear Jan," he said at last, drawing a deep sigh, "it is indeed a treasure-trove. The collection is by no means a large one, but it has such splendid specimens of such extraordinarily rare stamps that it must be worth *at least three thousand pounds*. There are several stamps worth more than three hundred pounds each."

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Two months later the collection was sold by auction in London for three thousand seven hundred pounds. And three months later again Janet and Robert were married. They were not rich, but they had enough to begin upon. They are richer now, but they always declare that their good fortune began with Aunt Muriel's Love-Letters.

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THE NAUGHTY PAGE

A TRUE MYSTERY OF LEIGH COURT

Leigh Court stands on the brow of a low hill, in the middle of a large park, about two miles and a half out of Courtleigh, though the Courtleigh Lodge is not many hundred yards from Cedar Cottage, the last house of the village in that direction.

It is a fine house, and the Leighs are looked upon in Daleshire as very fine people. The grounds are large and well kept, and there is a shrubbery on the north side of the house covering several acres, and called "the wilderness." In the middle of that wilderness stands a low obelisk with an inscription; and how that obelisk came to stand there is the purport of this story.

About forty years ago Sir Andrew Leigh reigned at Leigh Court, and he ruled strictly enough, being a hot-tempered man, apt to be violent in his anger, so that his dependants dreaded his displeasure. Among other servants there were then in his household a butler, who had been already for some years a trusted servant, a couple of footmen, and a page. The page's chief duty was to sit in the little seat behind her ladyship's pony-carriage when she drove out about the villages taking presents of tea, and the like, to her pensioners. The tall footmen would, either of them, have looked absurd crammed into that little seat, and yet my lady must have some one to look after the ponies while she was chatting to the old dames in their cottages. So the page was invented.

He was a naughty lad, not with any serious badness, but careless and disobedient. He had chums of his own age in the village, and was overfond of running off to join them in their frolics. As will be seen, this propensity had for the poor boy very grave consequences.

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The butler, who was a formal, staid man, had never liked the page, and the dislike was mutual. For the lad loved to outrage the dignity of the solemn upper servant. He was often impertinent to Mr. Binns, and Mr. Binns had from time to time to report Alfred to Sir Andrew or her ladyship. The boy did not come from the neighbourhood; he was an orphan whom Lady Leigh's sister, Lady Salterton, had brought up, and for whom, when Lord Salterton was made Governor of the Chin Settlements, she had been anxious to find a home. Perhaps that was one reason why Lady Leigh discovered that she wanted a page to look after her ponies when she drove herself out. Before that time she had taken her chance of finding a village boy to hold the ponies while she visited their mothers or grandmothers.

So, when Mr. Binns wanted to find fault with Alfred, he generally went to Sir Andrew, for her ladyship took the lad's part. But the baronet would send for him and scold him very roughly, as was his way. And the boy was really afraid of his master.

. . . . .

"I am sorry to be always complaining," said the butler one morning, "but really, Sir Andrew, I can do no good with that lad. He runs off to the village without asking leave of anybody, and comes back at all hours."

The baronet was standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the library fire, and he flared up immediately.

"Send him to me at once, Binns," he cried; "I'll give him such a talking to as he'll remember, I promise you."

And after the butler had added a few more particulars as to the boy's naughtiness, he left the room to tell him he was to go to the library to see Sir Andrew.

It happened that he could not quickly find him, and when he did so the lad was in such a pickle that he could not present himself before the baronet without ten minutes or so of cleaning and tidying.

Now, Sir Andrew was always an impatient man, and that morning he was in a hurry. It was petty-session day at Dartly, and he wanted to be off. So the delay made him very irritable, and when at last the naughty

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page appeared, his reprimands were terribly sharp and severe.

"And now you may go," he concluded, after five minutes of vehement scolding; "and remember this is the last time I speak. Binns tells me it is often after ten o'clock when you come in from the village. Understand that in future you are to be in by nine, even when you are out with leave. If you come in later you shall not be admitted, and you must spend the night wherever you can. If you choose to come back in the morning and seem to have learned a lesson, I will allow you to return and resume your work after you shall have received a sound whipping."

With a very red face, and without a word, Alfred left the room.

For some weeks it really seemed as if the baronet's angry reprimands had taken effect. The page had not run off once without leave, and on the occasions of absence with permission he had returned punctually. But this improvement was not, unluckily for the poor foolish boy himself, destined to last long.

A month or five weeks after Sir Andrew's lecture, the butler came to him as he was going to bed (they were very early folks at the Court, especially when they were alone), and said that Alfred had run off again without leave to the village, and had not yet returned. Was he really to be locked out?

"Certainly," said Sir Andrew, getting very red, "and in the morning let him have a birching that shall teach him to remember."

But in the morning there was no one to birch.

"Did that young scapegrace try to get in last night?" inquired the baronet of the footman, who was laying something on the breakfast-table when he came into the dining-room.

"No, Sir Andrew," replied the man; "I believe not. Nor he's not turned up this morning neither."

Sir Andrew looked a bit disturbed. He had felt sure the lad would have come home, however late, and that probably some one would have let him in.

"Finding we had locked him out, no doubt he went

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back to the village," the man remarked; "or perhaps he asked them to let him sleep at one of the lodges. He will sneak in presently."

But the page never sneaked in at all. At the lodges they knew nothing of him. They had seen him going through to the village about eight o'clock, while the family at the great house would be at dinner, but no one had seen him return.

From further inquiries in the village it appeared that the boy had left his naughty companions there very late, perhaps as late as half-past ten, and they had supposed he was going back to the Court. But probably he had not known fully how late it was, until, passing through the churchyard on his way, one of the quarters may have struck; or he might have seen the time, for the clock-face was large, the hours were marked on it in gilded brass, and there was a bright moon, nearly full. Or else he might have reached the Court, and finding it all locked up, he had remembered his master's threats, and had been afraid to rouse any one to gain admittance, and afraid even to return in the morning. He was just the sort of harum scarum lad to make up his mind all of a sudden to run away and go to sea, or try and enlist as a drummer-boy or bugler in the army.

Whatever had happened, he never was seen again at Leigh Court, and no news of him ever came to Lady Leigh. That she blamed her husband for his great severity the servants declared was evident, and it is certain she advertised for the missing lad, promising him full forgiveness if he would return. But she did so with little hope, for the lad himself never read anything, book or newspaper, and he was quite friendless.

To Leigh Court the naughty page came back no more, and in process of time he seemed forgotten.

Nearly two years after the September night on which the page disappeared from Sir Andrew Leigh's house in Daleshire there was a burglary in a small country house in Rentshire, and, of course, it was described in the newspapers as a "daring" one. In the newspapers every burglary is "daring," every suicide is "determined," every fire is "appalling."

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But, as it happened, this burglary really did seem to have been rather more daring than usual, for the house had been entered by a window closely adjoining the room in which the footman, the only manservant, slept, and it was evident that the thief must have made a good deal of noise in the course of his operations, and that without troubling himself about the proximity of the flunkey.

The footman was, naturally, the principal witness in the magisterial examination that followed.

He seemed, as he was, sincerely grieved at the loss that his master had sustained, and ashamed that he had not been vigilant enough to prevent it. There was really no independent reason to suspect the man of collusion with the robber, but he was obviously alive to the possibility of such a suspicion.

"I am such a terrible heavy sleeper," he said, "or else I ought to have heard the burglar, no doubt; but I am such a terrible heavy sleeper."

In the course of his examination the man alluded several times, and always with particular emphasis, to his being such a heavy sleeper, and at last this insistence attracted the attention of one of the two magistrates, neighbours of his master's, who were examining him.

"You go on a good deal about sleeping so hard," said this gentleman, "and you talk about dreaming, too; what has your dreaming got to do with it?"

The man seemed partly confused, and yet not altogether unwilling to speak. "Well, sir," he said, "I always have been a terrible heavy sleeper. But I expect more than ever of late."

"What makes you think so?" inquired the magistrate.

"I've always heard," replied the man, "that those who sleep heaviest dream hardest; and of late I've been a hard dreamer."

"Perhaps," suggested the gentleman, "you eat a heartier supper than you used formerly to do."

The footman shook his head. "It ain't that, sir," he said; "what bothers me is, why I should for ever be dreaming the same thing over and over again."

The magistrate listened more attentively. "And what is it that you dream?" he asked.

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But the man seemed shy of telling, and yet anxious to tell, all the same. But at last to the two magistrates alone did he tell his tale.

"Of course, sir," he protested, addressing himself to the one who had most questioned him, "it is only just a dream. You'll please recollect that it's nothing; only a dream."

"All right, get on with it," said the gentlemen.

"I first began to have this dream about eighteen or twenty months ago," began the footman, "and along of it I left a good situation. I was in service in Daleshire then, sir, at Leigh Court, Sir Andrew Leigh's place. It was a bigger place than this, a deal, and there were bigger wages. But I left it all along of that blessed dream. I got that I couldn't stand it, and I thought if I left, the dream would stay behind. But the dream came, too, so I gained nothing, except that I was out of the sight of that butler."

"Well, do let us have the dream," cried the gentleman who had spoken least.

"You'd better let him tell his tale his own way," said the other, and the footman looked as if that was so.

"There was another footman there, sir, besides me, and the butler; and there was a young lad as page. He sat behind her ladyship when she drove out by herself in the little pony-chaise, and my lady was very fond of him, I fancy. She took on dreadful when he disappeared. But the master was down on the boy—and he was terrible rough-tongued was Sir Andrew—and that lad was for ever in scrapes. There wasn't any harm in him, as I could ever see, but he was flighty and, as you might say, naughty. The butler was on the top of him, like a hundred of bricks, jawing, scolding, spiting him, and eternally sneaking to the master about the boy. Of course many a thing goes on in a big house that the master would rage about if he knew; and Mr. Binns himself was none so perfect but what there might have been many a rumpus if Sir Andrew had known all his little games. But he took care Sir Andrew shouldn't. And he took care every little thing that lad did should be made the most of, and told

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to the master. Well, I am for ever dreaming about that butler and that page."

He paused, as if he found it harder to go on now the lengthy preface was done, but at last did make a plunge into his story.

"And this is what I dream. But, of course, sir, you'll not forget as it is only my dream. Well, I seem, in my dream, to be standing outside in the gardens, on the front lawn, at Leigh Court; and it is night-time, and every one asleep in bed. The moonlight is falling on the grass out in the open, but the moon itself is behind the house, so that all the front of it is very black and dark, and its shadow lies out some way upon the grass. And as I look there comes skipping up the lawn (in my dream) that little, silly page. The moon shines on his face (in my dream) as plain as life. He was a pretty, merry-faced boy, and he seems almost laughing as he comes skipping over the smooth, soft grass, making no sound. But as he draws near the house I see him (in my dream—it's only a silly dream, you know, sir)—I see him go on tiptoe and walk ever so carefully up to a window, the window of the butler's pantry, round the rim of which I notice now a narrow edge of light, as if round the edge of a dark green blind. And soon the page is standing peeping in round the edge of that dark blind, and (in my dream) I seem able to peep in behind him. There, stooping over a package, is the butler, and he is —but, sir, you know it is only just my ridiculous dream, all this is only a dream—he is packing up pieces of silver plate, and the cases belonging to them stand empty at his side. And in my dream I seem to hear the page give a little laugh, as if because he had found the butler out, and that laugh the man heard. He looks up sudden in my dream, and, sir, a terrible bad look comes over his smooth, quiet, respectable face, and he turns to leave the room. I notice that he takes a napkin with him folded lengthways, and soon I see him in my dream open the door leading from the garden-hall, and the young lad goes tripping, tripping to meet him."

And now the footman hurries as he tells his tale, as if he could not tell it fast enough.

"And oh, sir, it is the truth, but please to remember

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that it is a dream. That lad runs quite up to where the butler stands in the black shadow, and then there comes a smothered cry; and soon across the lawn in the moonlight I see the man dragging something in his arms, and round it is a folded napkin, round its throat. He carries it, in my horrid dream, to the wilderness, and there I see him dig a hole and bury it, and cover it up with earth and sods and leaves and rubbish; and that is, sir, all of my dream. But it comes so often, and sir, I cannot bear it."

These two gentlemen and the footman went to Courtleigh, where they betook themselves to the Leigh Arms, from which hotel a note was sent to Sir Andrew which caused him to lose no time in coming to call upon the gentlemen. When he had heard all they had to tell, he drove all three out to the Court with him.

"Is Mr. Binns in?" he inquired of the footman who opened the door.

"No, Sir Andrew. It is Mr. Binns's afternoon off. He will not be in until dinner-time," the man replied. One footman, of course, had been with the carriage to Courtleigh, and was now gone to change. A pretext was made for removing the one who had remained at home from the neighbourhood of the large safe-closet where the plate not in daily use was kept, and an examination was there made.

"There is plenty of plate here that we have not used for ten years," said the baronet; "it is too grand for common use. And we live very quietly of late. It was last used at my daughter's wedding, two years and a half ago; here are the cases. They seem heavy enough."

So they were, and they were duly locked, but on opening proved empty of aught but stones.

"It is certainly very strange," said Sir Andrew.

"Now we must search the wilderness," said one of the magistrates. "Could you lead us to the place in it where, in your dream, you saw the page's body buried?" he asked, turning to the footman.

The footman shivered slightly, but said he knew the place only too well.

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"I've seen it so often in my dream."

And he was right. He led them to a tangled thicket, and there, on digging, the remains of a lad were actually found; the rotted remnants of a napkin were knotted round the neck, there were remains of livery-cloth, and a number of livery buttons, such as the page had worn upon his jacket.

"And now," said Sir Andrew, "we must inveigle the wretch into a confession, for the evidence against him is rather too preternatural for a Court of Justice, and yet we have none of us a doubt that he ought to hang."

"I can think of only one way to make him do it," observed the gentleman who had first thought there was something on the footman's mind. And he told his plan.

About seven o'clock the butler returned, and was at once summoned to the library, suspecting no discovery.

"Shut the door," said Sir Andrew, with a glance, as the man turned to do so, at the tall Japanese screen that hid the other door opening into the dining-room.

Then Sir Andrew stood up, with his back to the fireplace, and the butler saw that his face was very stern.

"The page is found," said Sir Andrew.

The man's face grew pallid, and his knees shook under him; he had to clutch at a chair for support. The smooth-faced, respectable Mr. Binns, the trusted upper servant, seemed to crumple up! His wretched eyes fell before the piercing glance of his master, and he felt his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth; he tried to stammer something, but his lips refused their office.

"The page is found," continued the remorseless voice, "in the wilderness, where you buried him."

"Have you nothing to say?" demanded the angry voice, after a miserable silence.

"What evidence is there against me?" stammered the guilty wretch, the words coming with difficulty from his dry and parched tongue.

"The same eye that saw you packing up my plate saw you bury the poor lad, and saw you strangle him with a folded napkin; saw you carry him across the lawn in the bright moonlight," said Sir Andrew. He spoke of the

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great Eye of God, but of that the man did not think. Such as he do not reck of God: He tells no tales, they flatter themselves, and for Himself they care nothing.

"It has been brought to my recollection," said Sir Andrew, "that you had a sore finger after the boy's disappearance. We know now that he bit you, and clutched in his hand was found a button such as you wear upon your wrist; inquiries will be made as to whether you had such a button sewn on by the tailor about that time."

Now, the butler knew, though Sir Andrew as yet did not, that no such repair had ever been attempted; the coat he had worn that night had never again been worn; he knew it would be found among his things, the missing button still unreplaced. And now he sank down and made a piteous confession, whereof, the other two magistrates, behind their screen, were witnesses.

Over the spot where the poor naughty page had been buried an obelisk was raised. On it was this inscription:

"The eye of God sees every crime.
He waits, but His judgment is certain and dread.
No man can cheat His punishments.
He finds out a witness to bring the truth to light,
And the sinner shall not mock Him for ever."

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MARLING'S LUCK

When Roger Marling stood on his father's doorstep waiting for the door to be opened, after he had rung the rather stiff bell, and regarded the very stiff-looking, old-fashioned knocker, he began to realize more completely what a difficult errand he had come upon. The knocker was very solid, like his father, and like Mr. Roger Marling, senior, was handsome in its way. But, also like the elder Mr. Marling, it had an uncompromising manner, which seemed to say, "Don't trifle with me; don't attempt it, for it will not be of the slightest use."

And Roger Marling, junior, perceived as he had not perceived yet, that it would not be at all easy to convince his father that the confession he had come to make was natural enough if not altogether excusable.

When the olive-green door of No. 511, Dorset Square, was opened by a parlour-maid in spectacles, who looked as if she had never remained less than twenty years in one situation and might have been in more than one, Roger recognized in her also something fatal and significant. His father was well enough off to keep butler and footman, the elderly parlour-maid was a kind of protest of economy and austere simplicity.

She admitted that Mr. Marling was at home, he dined at present at four, and it was now eleven minutes past three. Roger, at her invitation, "stepped into the dining-room," while she "stepped upstairs" to inform her master of his son's arrival, and while he waited, Roger confessed that dinner at four o'clock must also be against him. No man who *chose* to dine at such an hour—and this elderly widower, retired from business, had no one but himself to please—could be supposed likely to hear with indulgence that his son found himself somewhat

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encumbered by debt, and engaged to be married to a young lady with no prospects.

He did *not* receive the information with indulgence.

The room in which he sat was the back drawing-room, always the least attractive room in a London house of the type affected by Mr. Marling. The windows were closed, and the afternoon sun poured in down a motey shaft. The furniture was heavy, handsome, and well preserved, but uncommonly ugly.

Mr. Marling was not ugly, but his expression was heavy, and his temper was rather short than sweet.

"Well, Roger?" he said. "I can't shake hands, for the gout has come back and settled in my fingers—the fingers of the right hand. You needn't stand up, there are plenty of chairs. Had I known you were coming, I would have ordered something for your dinner. There's only a partridge——"

Roger hastily explained that he should be in the train again on his way back to Oxford long before dinner-time.

"Oh! and what brought you up? Something important, or you would hardly interrupt your studies to come to town for an hour or two."

Roger had one gift that his father approved, that of coming straight to the point, and he came. With more haste than heed he briefly informed the old gentleman that he had been spending more money than he realized, that he was, in plain English, in debt.

But, though old Marling liked coming to the point, it did not follow that he liked the point when it was arrived at.

"In debt? And to what extent?" he grunted pretty sourly.

"About five hundred pounds."

"About five hundred means seven or eight hundred, I dare say!"

"No. It means about five hundred. A few pounds under."

"And you have five hundred a year. In a year you can be out of debt."

"By living on nothing at all."

"Then live on nothing at all. I shall not give you sixpence. You have that five hundred a year your

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mother left you. I never approved of your going to Oxford, that was why I added nothing to your income—and because, at your time of life, five hundred a year is more than what you ought to have. I was right. If you get in debt on five hundred a year, you would get in debt on a thousand. I shall not give you sixpence. That's all!"

"No, it isn't. I'm engaged to be married——"

"To an heiress? If so, she can pay your debts—if she thinks you worth five hundred pounds."

Roger explained that she was by no means an heiress.

"I suppose she also owes five hundred pounds?"

"No. She doesn't owe anybody anything. But, she is a lady——"

"Probably. You couldn't be engaged to a gentleman!"

"She is a lady, well-born and well-bred and very good-looking——"

"Of course!"

"Not exactly. There are several plain women about——"

"Then look out for one with five hundred pounds, and if she likes your good looks better than her money, you will be out of debt."

There was really not much use in continuing such a conversation; on the whole, Roger kept his temper, explaining quietly that he had thought it right to tell his father both of his debts and of his engagement. If his father had chosen to advance the money the tradesmen needn't have waited for their money; as it was, they would have to wait, and as he had not wished to make any secret of his engagement, he had come to tell his father at once.

"Perhaps," snapped the old gentleman, "you thought I might come down with something—have some proposal that would enable you to marry soon."

"Perhaps I did. I am your only son, and you are well enough off to help me without missing it."

"You're not my only child, though. There's Phyllis—she sent me a haunch of venison yesterday, and I made the butcher take it instead of partridges, to be sent in as I order 'em. And Phyllis has five children, and will have

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five and twenty if she goes on like this, before she's forty. *I* didn't marry till I *was* forty, and you can wait as well as I could. Well, if you're going, good-bye. And explain to the tradesmen that you're three-and-twenty, and that not a penny of my money is settled on you. Elizabeth will let you out—you can't shut the front door from outside without banging it."

At Paddington, as Roger took his seat in a first-class carriage, because he had the return half of his ticket to use, he told himself that it must be third-class in future. He took out the half-ticket and looked at it and sighed a little as he put it away again. He had always been a first-class passenger and, frankly, liked it.

He tried to read but could not, and looked out of the window instead. Presently he took out a cigar and prepared to light it, thinking to himself: "No more cigars when these are done, Roger." (His father would have said "Mr. Marling." There are some people who are never on such easy terms with themselves as to Christian-name themselves.)

"Do you mind my smoking?" Roger inquired of the other passenger, an oldish gentleman with a crumply face and rather dazzling spectacles which seemed to catch the level rays of the sunset in a disconcerting manner.

"It's a smoking carriage," said the elderly gentleman, with a dab of one glove at the letters on the window-pane.

"Yes," said Roger, smiling, "but if you don't like it——"

"Then, I must lump it!" cried the oldish gentleman with a shake of the head, that filled the carriage with gleams from his spectacles.

"Not the least necessity," said Roger. "It doesn't say 'smoking *must* be carried on in this carriage.'"

"You'd not smoke if I said I hated it?"

"Certainly not," laughed Roger, putting away his match-box.

"And you'd curse me in your heart all the way to Oxford!" cried the oldish gentleman, triumphantly.

"Not a bit. I shouldn't think any more about it."

And Roger put his cigar away also.

"Well, I *like* smoking," chuckled the oldish gentleman, rubbing his hair delightedly. "I smoke, too!"

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Roger laughed and offered a cigar, which the other passenger took and lighted with a second snuffly chuckle and a sort of bounce on his seat.

"Good cigar," he declared after a whiff or so. "Expensive. Wealthy young gentleman——"

"Anything but——"

"Then extravagant!" cried the oldish gentleman. "That's no harm. Don't care much for prudence before thirty—or say five and thirty."

"I'm only twenty-three!"

"A dozen years before you need think of economy, then. Heh?" concluded the oldish gentleman rather sharply.

Roger smiled again, but without much heart in his smile, and took up a paper which he could not read, and presently let it droop, and stared out of the window again. Oxford tradesmen like to be paid, and some of these debts already pressed. Mildred's father might not approve of long engagements—especially to young men who owed a full year's income. For the moment Roger could only feel depressed, and he looked it.

"Come!" cried the oldish gentleman, sidling along the seat opposite. "Come, now, you've no right to look so downy-dumped and depress people. This isn't a mourning coach—is it, now? Come, now?"

"I can't help my looks. And, really, I can't help it if my looks bother you; I'll change carriages when we stop——"

"What for? What's the matter? Instead of changing carriages tell me what's the matter."

"The matter?"

"Yes, of course! Young fellows don't look like that unless there's something the matter. Come, now!"

"Really——"

"Oh! Really! Don't you tell me to mind my own business. Why should I? Is it love or money?"

"Both," said Roger, laughing a little, for it was clearly useless to seem angry.

"Hah! Lady false as well as fair? Come, now?"

"The lady is not in the least false."

"Hah! You tell me all about it. It'll save you trouble, you can't get away from me—and—just tell me

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what's the mischief. Come, now? *I* was in love once—*there*, now! And in debt once—THERE, now! And the girl married another fellow (not worth my waistcoat buttons), and repents it still, you may be sure of it. And I've heaps of money, and (THERE, NOW!) it was more exciting being in debt. Out with it. Come, now!"

Half laughing, half irritated, Roger did come then, and told his queer fellow-passenger all about it. It must not be supposed that he would have been quite so communicative with every one, though he was not at all a reserved person; but the oldish gentleman invited confidence not only by asking for it. In spite of his crumply face and pouncing manner, there was something hearty and kind about him.

When Roger had finished, he said—

"Come, now! These debts should be paid at once, and you can't live on nothing a year, even for one year. I'll lend you five hundred pounds. There, now!"

"You! Why on earth should you lend me five hundred pounds?"

"No reason in life. I don't set up for being particularly reasonable. Wait a bit!"

Thereupon he dashed at a dressing-bag and drew thence a fountain-pen and a cheque-book, and wrote a cheque on his knee with a sort of fuming hurry that was as queer as everything about him.

"There, now!" he cried, waving the cheque wildly in the air to dry it, and then thrusting it under Roger's nose.

"You haven't even asked my name," said Roger, who saw that the draft was made out to "self or bearer."

"Don't care particularly about your name. *Your* name's not the point. Hah! *My* name at the bottom—that's the point. Don't deny it?"

"All the same, I must tell you my name—it's Roger Marling."

"Junior!" cried the oldish gentleman (whose own name the cheque proclaimed to be Miles O'Grady), "son of Roger Marling, of Marling and Growler; not a bit like him though (like Mary). Well, well! Wonderful coincidence. Well, now! So you're son of Roger Marling that used to live in Dorset Square! There, now."

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"He lives there still. But, Mr. O'Grady, I ought not to let you think my father would in any way make himself responsible for this debt."

"No fear of my asking him," snapped the oldish gentleman, with another bounce on his seat. "I'm going to sleep," he announced. "Don't call me till Oxford." And in about thirty seconds he gave the loudest proof of his having kept his word by a snore that positively shook him.

This gave Roger so good an opportunity of putting away the cheque with less embarrassment that he half suspected the snore and the slumber. When Oxford was reached, however, Mr. O'Grady appeared to be so very drowsy that it was impossible to wake him effectually.

"Good-bye," he murmured sleepily, "I'm going on. Don't wake me. I've a dream to finish" (snore! snore!). And Roger was fain to leave him to his slumbers.

As soon as he was sure the young man had really gone, and was not coming back, Mr. O'Grady woke up and said to the railway carriage in general—

"'Straordinary thing! Mary's son. Like her, too! Well, now! Might have been *my* son; pity he isn't. Old Roger as crusty as ever, that's plain."

Young Roger drove straight to a semi-detached, meagre-looking villa in St. Giles's Road, and asked for Mr. Hornby. Mr. Hornby saw him alone in a meagre little study, and tried to look quite at sea as to the purpose of his visit, but Mildred had told her mother and he knew all about it. Having nothing on earth to "settle" on his daughter (and four other daughters, with nothing to settle on *them*) he could not take a very high line as to prospects.

"Five hundred a year is not much!" he said, with the air of having more for self and family, "but young people marry on less,"—he had married on a hundred and eighty (perhaps unwisely)—"and Mildred has not been brought up extravagantly."

"Yes; but we must wait two years. I owe a debt of honour of five hundred pounds. I can pay it in two years; then I shall be free, and the five hundred a year will be free."

"Ah, clear, yes——" But it was obviously clear that

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Mr. Hornby had nothing to urge against a delay of two years. Mrs. Hornby and he had waited six.

Meanwhile, Mr. O'Grady in his railway-carriage was reminding himself that young Roger had not asked his address.

"Never gave him the chance. Suppose he wants to pay me back? How can he find me? There, now!"

But at the end of two years Mr. O'Grady received a visitor, who had learned his address in London from the banker whose name, he assured himself (without in the least believing it), Roger would never make any note of.

"Hulloa! young Roger. Want another five hundred? Won't get it. Sit down, though."

Young Roger laughed and sat down, handing the oldish gentleman a banker's receipt for five hundred and fifty pounds.

"I paid it in," he explained, "and told them it was a repayment of a debt."

"Fifty pounds too much," snapped the oldish gentleman. "Oh, interest? Two years at five per cent., eh? Well, now! I knew you'd pay it back. Well, then, and are you married?"

"Not yet. In a month. Will you come to the wedding?"

"As best man? There, now! Yes, I'll come. No wedding present, though—can't choose things."

Mr. Marling, senior, would *not* go to the wedding, nor did he send any present. He chose to be annoyed that Roger had paid his debts without the slightest further allusion to them, and he had always intended his son to marry a certain Honourable Agrippina Moneybanks, who was barely five years older than Roger himself, and granddaughter of the Earl of Kirriemuir (her father having predeceased that nobleman who was still alive) and would, of course, be granted the style and precedence of an Earl's daughter, when her brother, Lord Sandhill, should succeed him. To show his displeasure, and make it up to the young lady, he married her himself, and had several daughters with long lips and short hair, like the Honourable Mrs. Marling.

"Well, now!" said the oldish gentleman, "what a pity he didn't marry her at first instead of Mary, then

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Roger would have been *my* son and his name would have been Miles. However, the Honourable Agrippina was only four years old then. Come, now."

He kept his word as to bringing no wedding present, and only pished and sniffed at the presents other people had given.

"Entrée-dishes—no entrées on five hundred a year. Come, now! And six card-cases, and four silver umbrella-handles, and twenty-one silver flower-vases. Pooh, there!"

But when Roger and Mildred returned from a very modest wedding-jaunt in Normandy, the oldish gentleman met them at Charing Cross Station, and said—

"I've come to meet you. There, now! And you've got to come to Waterloo (not the battle one) and we'll go down by the luncheon-train, and you're to stay at a little house that I've bought, on a visit, temporarily. Ugly place, but comfortable."

At Chalkminster he bundled them out, and pushed them into a neat brougham with a rail-top for the luggage.

"Home!" he called out to the neat coachman, and promptly slipped up beside him on the box. Out of the town they drove, and into the country for four miles or so, till they turned in at a neat lodge-gate, and so up a short avenue through a tiny park of thirty or forty acres, to the front door of a quaint, very pretty manorhouse.

"Thorncote Manor?" the oldish gentleman inquired of the coachman, as if quite uncertain of the identity of the house.

"Thorncote Manor, sir," replied the coachman, quite unmoved, and touching his hat with his whip-handle.

"Here we are, then," observed the oldish gentleman, slipping down and going to the carriage window. "You'd better get out here, temp'rally. Come, now!"

So they got out and walked in.

"You'd better wait," said the oldish gentleman over his shoulder to the coachman.

"Like it?" demanded the oldish gentleman in the hall. "Like it?" he demanded again in the charming old drawing-room, furnished with perfect taste and every comfort. "Like it?" he repeated, as he bustled them into the dining-room (where dinner was laid for two) and

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into the library, and up the beautiful carved oak staircase.

"There's six hundred acres of it," he said with a bounce, pointing out of the window in the corridor upstairs. "Like 'em? Let's have tea then. Come, now! You'll stand me tea, Mrs. Marling? then I'll catch the 5.50 back to town, and you can write and tell me if you *do* like it. Here," he concluded, pushing a legal-looking envelope into Roger's hand—"title-deeds. There, now! My wedding present, unless you'd rather change it for entrée-dishes—or umbrella-handles. Come, now!"

He never sat down till he left them; even his tea he took by snaps, so to speak, pouncing about the drawing-room.

"Hulloa! Goodish old cabinet! Like one *I* had. Well, now! Niceish bit of tapestry—genuine, like a bit *I* bought. Like this carpet? Like those curtains, like those Chippy chairs? Well, so *I* do. Like that cloth?—Twenty past five, by Jove! train goes at five-fifty. I'm off now! Very well. See me off if you must. Stay on now? No. Come back, then? If you like!"

As he skipped into the brougham he poked at the door panel.

"Like that crest? Not mine, though. Like yours, eh, Roger?"

And he was gone, and really they had *not* had a chance of thanking him.

A queer story, you will say, and impossible.

"True, though," as the oldish gentleman himself would have said. "There, now!"

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THE UNCALLED WITNESS

I

JOHN RICKSHAW looked round the room and a smile of satisfaction crept over his face. Outside, the rain was being driven pitilessly against the windows, and a bitter wind was sobbing round the old roadside inn, and whistling in the naked branches of the five great elms from which it took its name. But indoors there was a delightful air of warmth and comfort.

Twenty years ago the Five Elms was a very important house on the direct road between Chesterbury and Oketon, and in those days there was no communication between those two places except by coach; now the railway connects them, and it passes nowhere near the cross-roads where stands the ancient hostelry. But there was no railway on that night, in late November, of which we are speaking, when John Rickshaw pulled in his chair to the fire and gave himself up to the enjoyment of his cosy quarters.

He had been caught by the storm and drenched to the skin, and it had been very pleasant finding such a haven as this, where a blazing fire, a well-warmed bedroom, and excellent fare awaited him. He had thoroughly enjoyed the luxury of changing from wet to dry clothes, and from sodden boots to warm slippers. He had done full justice to the plentiful meal that he had found spread for him on coming down to the cheerful parlour, with its warm-looking, red-flock paper, its old coaching prints and fox-brush over the mantelpiece; and now he was going to enjoy his pipe and one of the well-worn novels he had discovered in a cupboard behind the door.

He stretched his long legs out across the rug, whereupon Rogue, his terrier, made use of his left slipper for a

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head rest (whence it will be gathered that Mr. Rickshaw's armchair stood on the right side of the fireplace), and took another glance round before starting on the book.

The curtains of faded but thick and once handsome woollen stuff were drawn close, the shutters barred behind them, and a tall screen of red baize stood between the closed door and himself; certainly it was all very agreeable and pleasant. Then he began to read; the book was a sporting novel of the Handley Cross type, broadly amusing, ever so cheerful, and not too exciting. The pictures, by Leech and Cruikshank, were better than the letterpress.

In half an hour John Rickshaw was asleep, and was half aware that it was so. He had felt himself dropping into a doze, and had made no effort against doing so—a doze under the circumstances would be very far from unpleasant.

"*Numéro Seize, Rue Paradis!*"

Who had spoken? In an instant Rickshaw was sitting up, rubbing his eyes and peering sleepily around, and Rogue was no longer asleep with his head resting lazily on his master's foot. The dog was growling angrily, his hair bristling fiercely, and his teeth showing in an ugly snarl.

"Who said that?"

Of course, no one replied, for there was no living being in the room except John and the terrier Rogue. But now the dog attracted his master's attention. His whole body was rigid, and his sharp little eyes were fastened on the very spot where Rickshaw was sitting; but the man felt that in that fierce stare the dog did not see him, was not looking at himself at all.

"*Numero Séize, Rue Paradis,*" repeated John. "Who on earth said that?"

Then he got up and watched the dog, who never took his eyes off the chair in which his master had been sitting.

Presently the dog literally flew at it, or rather, at such a spot close to it as would have been occupied by the ankles of any one sitting in it, and his jaws clapped together fiercely as they closed on the empty air. Meanwhile he kept up a horrid snarling, and Rickshaw did almost begin to think the animal had gone mad. After a minute or so spent in worrying the inoffensive air the dog relapsed into

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quiescence, and slunk away into a corner, where now and then, however, he still indulged in a sullen growl.

"*Numéro Seize, Rue Paradis*," muttered John Rickshaw to himself, seating himself again, but not now in that arm-chair half surrounded by the screen. "Who could have said that?"

He knew it was a street number, but a street number obviously in some foreign town, and John had never been out of these islands. He had assuredly never heard the name before, and yet he knew well enough that it was his own lips that had uttered the sounds, his own lips while he was almost, if not quite asleep.

He rose from his chair, and, folding the screen together, put it in a corner, then he looked beneath the table and in the curtained recess of the windows, but found exactly what he expected to find—nothing. The room was well lighted and eminently cheerful, but he felt a sensation of mystery and dread, that was not cheerful, creeping over him.

He neither believed nor disbelieved in "the preternatural," as people call all ghostly and inexplicable visitings and experiences, for hitherto he had literally never once given the slightest attention to any such subject. But he knew that now something mysterious and out of all experience had suddenly risen up in his path. He could not explain that cry of his own, and still less could he understand the chill feeling of dread that had followed it.

II

Jack Rickshaw was still gazing deep into the red heart of the fire, pondering on what had happened to him, when there came a tap at the door, and the landlord entered with the visitors' book, in which he asked John to write his name. The young man thought, and probably rightly, that the visitors' book was chiefly a pretext for a little conversation, and at any other time he would have been willing enough, for he was a sociable fellow, not at all given to stand upon his dignity. But now he felt unlike himself, and averse to such easy chit-chat with a garrulous old man.

His own name was the only one on the page, but,

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turning back overleaf, he found that the last entry was that of the name of Ethel Gore, bracketed with that of Philip Gore, as though the names were those of husband and wife, or perhaps of brother and sister.

"Why, you seem to have had no one here except myself for three weeks," he remarked, noticing the date of these entries.

"Well, sir, it has been a slack time for guests stopping in the house; but we've had one at any rate since that gentleman and lady. He came two days after they had left. I wanted him to write his name in the book, and he said he would, but he forgot, or pretended to, and he never did let out what his name was."

"Why should you think he wanted to conceal it?"

"I don't say as he did, sir; I don't say nothing about it. But we never did get at what his name might be."

John Rickshaw was thinking about his own experience, and the reticence of the nameless traveller did not interest him; he asked no further question, though, had he but known it, that reticent traveller was very intimately connected with the very matter on which his thoughts were busy.

"The bride and bridegroom were on their way abroad," said mine host, seeing that his guest refused all interest in the nameless gentleman. "Oh yes, sir, they was a bride and bridegroom, just married; and they was going to Jepp (Dieppe). They left a trunk behind by mistake, and we've been expecting to hear from them about it ever since, but they've not sent a word."

After a few more attempts on the part of mine host to lure John Rickshaw into conversation, he gave it up as a bad job, and with evident reluctance, relieved the young man of his presence. As some reparation for his own dulness, John gave the old man a London paper of that day's date which he had not seen, and with which he went away delighted.

But his absence was of the shortest. Ten minutes had not passed before, without knocking at all this time, he had rushed back into the parlour where John was sitting, breathless with excitement and brandishing the newspaper wildly in his hand.

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"Why, sir, they're missing! Been missing almost ever since leaving here—the bride and bridegroom, I mean. 'The impossibility of tracing the missing gentleman and his bride is very perplexing,' the paper says. 'It is even mysterious.' Look, sir, read for yourself. It's in your own paper."

John took the paper and did read. It was as the old man had said. A newly married couple, whose name was that of the bride and bridegroom of the visitors' book, had absolutely disappeared within a few days of their wedding. It was known that they had been going abroad, but whither they were to turn their steps after leaving Paris no one had been informed, the young couple having probably not themselves decided before leaving England. There was, however, no evidence that Paris ever had been reached; on the contrary, it seemed impossible to believe that they could have reached it, for no letters had been claimed there by them; no trace of them was to be found at any hotel—indeed, no such was forthcoming since they had left England.

There may have been no special reason why John Rickshaw should have shared in the landlord's excitement, but that he did so share in it he did not attempt to conceal from himself, and for half an hour he was listening earnestly to all that the old man could tell him in reference to the missing couple.

Even when he went to bed he lay awake thinking of it.

At length sleep began to creep over him, and his eyes were sealing themselves in slumber when from his lips there came again that unbidden speech, "*Numéro Seize, Rue Paradis.*"

He jumped up with a start, as if unwilling to believe that he must, in truth, have been himself the speaker; but there was certainly no one but himself to have spoken. He now found himself hopelessly awake, painfully alert; so, lighting the candle again, he prepared to read. He had brought up the old-fashioned novel, for, to tell the truth, he had the bad habit of reading in bed, and now he turned over the leaves to find his place in it. As often happened, he had opened the book too far ahead, and he observed that here the text was sometimes underlined, as in such books it often is, with the intention of marking the

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reader's approval or disapproval. Occasionally several words together had been scored under, though oftener there was but a single word marked, and frequently it seemed that the reader who had so marked the book had been too lazy to do more than score a letter.

There was certainly nothing very remarkable in this, and at any other time John would hardly have noticed it, but to-night he was in a mood to notice anything. Getting out of bed, he brought back with him a pencil and a bit of paper, then he searched for the first of the single letters, as there were much fewer of them, and began putting them down on his paper in the order of their occurrence. This took some time, as these letters had to be sought throughout the whole book, and when all the letters were found they read together thus, "Sidarapeurivx." That certainly had no appearance of forming any word, English or foreign, but you will hardly be surprised to hear that John tried the result of reversing their order, when, of course, the letters read thus, "XVI Rue Paradis."

Then, indeed, was John Rickshaw interested, and eagerly he set to work transcribing the marked words, which, as first written, made no sort of sense, but which, he felt sure, were capable of an arrangement that would cover some very important sense indeed.

III

John Rickshaw was a young man of abundant means and sufficient leisure, and he had both the power and the inclination for the quest upon which he now embarked. By noon next day he was at Newhaven, before night he was at Dieppe. But at Dieppe he found no Rue Paradis; nor was there any such street at Rouen or at Amiens. Would he have to visit every town in France to find the one where the Rue Paradis exists?

Chance did for him what perhaps nothing but chance could have done. On a wall not far from the bridge at Amiens he saw an "affiche," "Maison à louer," then followed particulars of the house that was to be let, and in larger letters lower down the poster, "Rue Paradis 16, Contreville."

That John Rickshaw literally jumped will be readily believed.

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Contreville, he learned, was a village four miles out west from the town, and thither he at once betook himself; and there he found, without much difficulty, the agent responsible for the letting of that furnished house, No. 16, Rue Paradis. It was a very pretty house, the last in the village, looking away over the level fields, and surrounded on all sides but one with a large garden. But the garden was a wilderness, and it seemed that the house had not been recently inhabited.

John remarked on this to the old woman who had come with him to open the doors.

Yes, she admitted, the garden was rather wild, but labour was very cheap, she said, and if Monsieur liked the house the garden would soon be got tidy again. No, the house had not been empty long, only the other day it had been let. To whom? Oh, to a gentleman, a rich gentleman. English? Yes, the gentleman had, as it happened, been English; there had been no objection to him on that account. Was not Monsieur himself also from England? Many English come in the summer to Contreville. True, this was not summer, but the winter at Contreville was very mild. No, she could not remember how long the English gentleman had stopped; he had only left about fifteen days—less than fifteen days. Yes, he had had some visitors: two, a lady and another gentleman. No, she had not seen them, they had only stayed a very short time. But had not Monsieur better ask the agent at Amiens all these questions? She could only say that the house was not at all damp, and the drains were excellent. Another English family two years ago had seen to that; they had talked of them all day long.

Later in the day John came again to the house, and this time he came alone, alone save for Rogue, who never left him on any of his journeyings. He had a conviction that he was on the track of a mystery, but he was very far from being convinced that he should succeed in the unravelling of that mystery. He had since the morning found that the name of the English gentleman who had lately occupied this house was Graham; but the discovery was of little service, for he had not known the name of the reticent traveller who would not sign the visitors' book at the Five Elms Inn, and there was no certainty that

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Graham was the true name of the English gentleman who had chosen to give it.

The names of the lady and gentleman who had visited him John utterly failed to ascertain, nor could he gain any information as to their appearance; it seemed that they had remained only a few hours. No one, indeed, had actually seen them go, but it was certain that they did go, for Mr. Graham himself left next day, summoned to England by a telegram.

At No. 16, Rue Paradis, Mr. Graham had left no trace of his sojourn. He had paid his rent, and had made no complaints, and had evidently been considered a model tenant by the agent, who considered the English too much given to frivolous criticism of drains and other ridiculous matters.

At No. 16, Rue Paradis, John found no trace of Mr. Graham; not a scrap of paper, not an old envelope—nothing. He had, in truth, only been tenant for a few weeks, but he might as well have never been there at all for all signs of his presence he had left.

John wandered through the house, forced to admit that he had discovered nothing, and yet more than ever convinced that there was something to discover if he could only get the clue. Rogue walked at his heels, obviously much bored, and disapproving of the whole proceeding. So they passed through room after room until there were no rooms left to examine; then John was coming away, but a thought occurred to him. To such a house there were no doubt stables, and he found them without difficulty; none, however, of the keys he had been given seemed to fit the lock. The whole time he was trying the keys Rogue growled sulkily, with his nose pushed under the half-decayed door of the coach-house.

John now sought the agent. He explained that the stabling had not been used by any tenants for several years; no, he had not given monsieur the key, but he would, of course, do so. It proved very hard to find the key, which was not found at all in the agent's offices. He and John went together to the house, and searched there for it, ultimately finding it hanging up in a disused cupboard. The agent thought it had probably hung there for years; but John did not think so.

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At the coach-house door Rogue renewed his protest fiercely.

"Wait," said his master to the agent. "I will shut him up in the house." And he did so.

Then the door of the coach-house was opened, and the two men went in. It was a large place, very dismal, as any long-disused building is bound to be, and with a damp smell of decaying woodwork. The floor was boarded and strewn with sand, in one corner was an old and broken-down carriage.

The agent was a good deal surprised at the evident interest that John took in the place, and his surprise was not lessened when the young Englishman went for his dog, that, as has been said, he had shut into the stable. No sooner had they loosed the animal than he rushed into the coach-house, and, with savage snarlings, began to tear at the sand in one corner of the floor, as though he desired to tear up the floor itself.

John asked quite calmly if a couple of workmen could be obtained, and the astonished agent replied that they certainly could—but for what did monsieur wish to get them? That monsieur did not fully explain, but the men were soon got, and by his orders they speedily had removed a portion of the wooden flooring; under it was another layer of sand, and dust, and rubbish; that being removed, a layer of obviously fresh concrete was brought to light.

Embedded in the concrete were the bodies of a young man and of a young woman.

IV

The friends of the missing bride and bridegroom had no difficulty in identifying the remains as those of their relations. But it seemed at first less easy to obtain a clue to the identity of their murderer.

"You say," observed John Rickshaw, "that neither of the deceased had any acquaintance of the name of Graham? Had they any knowledge of a man called Septimus Grey?"

It did not then appear that there had been any such person known to the youthful victims. And for the present Rickshaw refused to state why had he put the

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question. But a few days later he had an interview with the mother of the murdered bride, and abruptly put the same query to her. At first she hesitated, and was evidently disinclined to answer candidly. But the lawyers pushed the inquiry, and she admitted there had been a gentleman of the name of Septimus Grey; he had indeed been engaged to marry her daughter, and the fact was the young lady had jilted him. The poor lady, with many tears, told the whole story, which was a discreditable one to the dead girl, who had obviously thrown over an elderly lover for a younger, handsomer, and richer one.

A portrait of Septimus Grey was, after some delay, forthcoming, and the villagers of Contreville unhesitatingly declared it was that of the Mr. Graham who had for a short time been the tenant of No. 16, Rue Paradis. Later on it was identified by the landlord of the Five Elms as that of the reticent traveller who would not write his name in the visitors' book.

"How did the name of Septimus Grey become known to you?" asked one of the lawyers, of John Rickshaw.

John first explained how he had originally learned the name of the house in France where the murder had been committed.

"In that same book," he said, "were many words, as well as those isolated letters, underscored; and among these the number 7 and the word *grey* occurred frequently, and these were doubly underlined, the only words so marked. I felt sure they had some special meaning. As it happened, no other of the scored letters would by any possibility make a name, and a name I was eagerly in search of. It was, of course, easy to get a surname out of *grey*, but I must admit it was not for a long while that I thought of reading the figure 7 as a Christian name—Septimus."

"And the other underlined words, of which you speak, do they make anything of importance in this connection?" asked the man of law.

"There they are," said John; and he placed before him a paper, with perhaps a hundred or more words all jumbled together.

"Have you made out their order?"

"Yes; it took me many days. I had discovered those

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poor creatures' bodies before I had found out the order of these words; you will find that there are one hundred and forty-four exactly—that is, twelve rows of twelve words each. After trying many arrangements of them, I hit on this one. It is got by placing the words as they came in the book, then reversing them, then putting them in columns of twelve, and reading perpendicularly upwards from the last letter, instead of horizontally from left to right in the ordinary way, commencing from the first."

He produced another paper with the letters so arranged. Thus read, they contained a metaphorical expression of the writer's determination to be terribly avenged for the cruel wrong he had suffered, an expression easy to understand in the light of the dreadful knowledge that had been obtained.

The French doctors declared that the death of the murdered pair must have occurred at the very time John had so unaccountably started from sleep, with the name upon his lips of the place of their murder.

Septimus Grey was arrested, and, very much to the disappointment of the detectives engaged upon the case, himself made a full confession. Revenge had been his sole object, a morbid but irresistible desire to chronicle his crime beforehand had impelled him to the marking of the book.

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A WINTER'S TALE

I

In the centre of the Thuringian Forest, embedded among pine-clad hills, lies a little town that we may call Engelbach, so remote from railways and steamers that the polyglot gibberish of the tourist is unheard up there, and Baedeker and Murray alike ignore it.

The little town is perched on a low spur of one of the hills called Gottstein, around whose rocky base the river curves sharply, brawling over a stony bed, and making the crag on which the town stands almost into an island. A hundred feet higher than the town, crowning a jutting precipice of naked rock, sits the grim castle, once the stronghold and still the home of the princes of the House of Reichstein.

Once the land for many a score of leagues around owned the sway of the feudal lords of Reichstein; and goodly was the train of lesser lords and knights who followed the prince's black and yellow standard when he went forth to harry the Guelphs or Hapsburgs. And even a hundred years ago the Reichsteins still exercised sovereign rights of life and death, hanging their recalcitrant lieges, with little ceremony of trial, from a gibbet on the town wall overhanging the river at its darkest and deepest point.

But, either through the dowering of their daughters, century after century, or through the chance or mischance of war, there is little left now of the once wide domains of the Black Prince of Reichstein. When the head of the Prussian State was a petty marquess, fifty towns and two hundred castle-fortresses floated the black banner with the golden horseshoe that was the ensign of Reichstein. And now that the Prussian King is German Emperor and a leader among the monarchs of Europe, there remain

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to the Prince of Reichstein but one town and three half-ruined castles.

In the midst of the town of Engelbach is the Hofplatz, flanked on one side by the great church of the Holy Spirit; on the east, by the Rittersaal or Hall of Knights, where the vassal lords of the League of the Golden Horse-shoe used to meet their chief; on the west, by the prison, black and frowning; and northward, by the Hall of Justice. A broad flight of steps leads up from the square to the Rittersaal; and on the topmost stage, immediately before the portals of the hall, is a large and very beautiful statue. It represents an angel standing with wings wide spread, as though covering the town with their protection; the face is turned to heaven, and the arms and hands are outstretched in supplication.

Until the Napoleonic wars, there rested on the brow of the statue a massive diadem of purest gold, glittering with many gems, and said to have been worth many thousand thalers. The statue itself is of immense age, and has stood, with one brief exception, in the Hofplatz of Engelbach for not less than five centuries. Concerning that exception—that one short period in which there was no bronze angel on the pedestal in the Hofplatz—I now propose to tell you.

In the year of grace, 1420, Conrad III. succeeded his brother, Rudolph IV., as Lord of Engelbach and Prince of Reichstein. He was the first to be known as the Black Prince, in allusion to his black shield, his black armour, and his black hair and eyes. A year after his accession, he married Mechtildis, daughter of his cousin, Hildebrand von Reichstein, Count of Schwarzbach; and again a year after that, the fair young princess died, leaving her widowed husband the heart-broken father of a tiny, sad-faced prince.

This boy was called Rudolph, after his uncle, whose death had caused Prince Conrad far more sorrow than his own accession to the headship of their home had given him pleasure. As the baby prince was motherless, a foster parent had to be sought for him; and one was found in the wife of an honest woodman, whose own son had been born a week or two before the birth of Rudolph and the death of the Princess Mechtildis.

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The woodcutter's name was Franz, and his wife was called Gertrude; and they were very good people, and served God with great simplicity in their quiet home in the deep silence of the pine forest. They did not refuse the care of the motherless baby prince, but Gertrude was sad to leave her cottage and go and live in the palace. Franz might have gone too, but he could not bear to live idly in the castle; so for a time he and his wife were separated. As the cottage in the woods was nearly two leagues distant from the Schloss of Reichstein, Gertrude and Franz could not meet every day, though they did see each other often.

The little prince grew stronger as the time went by. He was a manly child, full of courage and high spirit, the idol of his lonely father, who had never remarried, but lived solitary in his grim castle perched above the brawling River Spey.

The prince's foster-brother was, as was natural, unlike the child of a peasant. His stalwart frame and vigorous constitution he had inherited from his peasant forefathers; but from his gentle bringing up in the castle of his prince, the boy had learned the graces of chivalry and all the courtesies of nobility. He was almost exactly the same height as Prince Rudolph, but as fair as his young master was dark. Rudolph had the sable locks and sad, deep, black eyes of his race; while Ludwig's hair was like spun yellow flax, and his merry eyes were like a summer sky.

II

When Rudolph and Ludwig were ten years old, Gertrude obtained Prince Conrad's leave to go back to her husband's cottage in the silent forest. But Ludwig stayed at the castle with his foster-brother, and the children were all in all to each other. It was a happy enough life they led—in some ways just such a life as children of their age and in their position would live nowadays; in other respects, very different, and peculiar, to our ideas. Ludwig never forgot that Rudolph would one day be his prince, and there was everything to remind Rudolph of his rank and greatness; and yet the boys were in their daily life, their sports, and their studies simply equals.

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At the time of which we are speaking, the land to the south, west, and east, for leagues and leagues, belonged to Prince Conrad. But four leagues to the northward his territories were touched by those of Heinrich, Count of Ehrlich; and at the very frontier stood a stronghold of Count Henry's, an almost impregnable mountain fortress called Drachensberg, from the white dragon that was the armorial ensign of the house of Ehrlich.

The Counts of Ehrlich had ever been turbulent neighbours of the Reichsteins. There had been a special cause for anger on the part of Count Henry against his neighbour. For the Count had desired to win the hand of his fair kinswoman, Mechtildis, who had been deaf to his pleadings, and been won by those of Conrad.

The birthdays of the two boys came within twenty days of each other; but both were kept together on that of the little prince, which fell on the 23rd of October. It was decided that the good Gertrude should come from her cottage in the forest to be their guest at the palace on the day before the birthday, and remain until the day following. It was the first year that she had been absent from the castle since the boys were born.

The birthday passed by joyfully, and the boys were very sad next day at having to let their mother go away again. The day after a feast has often a melancholy feeling, and there was something about the weather that added to the depression. The 23rd had been a beautiful autumn day, bright and smiling, though very cold; but the 24th dawned grey and cheerless, and as the day strengthened it only grew more chill and dismal.

Almost directly after dinner, and just as the noontide Angelus was ringing from the Stiftkirche, Gertrude, accompanied by her son and foster-son, set out from the castle on her way back to the cottage in the forest. Her husband had gone back earlier in the day, and the prince had given leave for the boys to escort their mother.

Young as they were, they were good horsemen, and well used to riding alone through the paths of the forest. Now all three rode forth on their hardy mountain ponies, prepared to enjoy the exercise and one another's company. From the castle to the cottage was only a short distance, but they were in no hurry to get the journey over, and it

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was past one o'clock when they reached Gertrude's house. Then the boys declared they must rest their ponies awhile, and Gertrude was too glad to have them with her to be very firm in telling them they ought to ride straight home again.

The woodman's cottage was very cosy, and the boys made themselves comfortable by the great spluttering log-fire in the wide-open hearth listening to Gertrude's wonderful legends of wolves and fairies and ogres—only there were no ogres left in the Thuringian Forest then. Rudolph and Ludwig always wished there were; they thought it would be such fun to tease them, like Franz Hartmann in the story.

They were now absorbed in such a story, when the woodcutter himself came in. He told them that it was two hours and a half past noon, and reminded them that the darkness would come early on such a day, especially in the thick forest where it was always so much darker than out in the open fields. So the boys made their farewells rather hurriedly and set out homeward.

III

"Ludwig, there's a snowflake!"

It was only twenty minutes since they had left the cottage, but it had grown quite dusk. A bitter wind came sobbing down from the north, making the black pines wring their hands, and moan and bow their heads like mourners at a Requiem.

And now suddenly the snow began to fall out of the low-stooping clouds. In five minutes the flakes fell so thick that even out in the open country it would have been hard to tell one's way. Here in the forest, where all the paths were so much alike and the landmarks were so few, it became impossible.

"My lord," said Ludwig, "shall we not turn back to the cottage? It is much nearer than Reichstein; and as soon as my father sees the snow, I am sure he will come out and follow us to see if we have fared aright. So we shall meet him, especially if we shout out now and then as we go."

But Rudolph shook his head.

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"Nay, we must press on. The Prince will certainly send men to meet us, even if he come not himself. And he will chide us if we have turned back."

And Rudolph was determined to push on.

They did not talk much together. The snow was blinding, and the freezing blast howled louder and louder through the forest, so that sometimes one would have thought it was the cry of a pack of wolves. Now and then they would consult each other's faces. And still thicker and thicker fell the snow, obliterating everything and making all the forest one great confusion of black and white.

"This is the first snow of the season," thought Rudolph to himself.

It had always been the children's delight to watch the first snow as it whirled round and round in the great yard of the castle. "The angels are making the beds," they used to declare, "and the feathers are coming out."

Still the boys pressed onward bravely; making, however, but slow progress, owing to the wind, and the snow, and the uncertainty of the way. Presently on their ears fell the sound of approaching riders; they could hear the dull thud of heavy horsehoofs on the ground, and of men's voices, and once there was a loud laugh.

"They are come to look for us," said the boys; and they thought their troubles were all over, and began forthwith to wonder why they had been uneasy at all.

They were, in fact, very soon face to face with the party that was come to meet them—a party of three men, but all strangers. One of the three was much taller than the others, and rode a huge black horse; and he seemed to be treated with deference and awe by his companions.

"And who are you?" he cried as he reined up, glancing curiously at the two boys.

"I am Rudolph, Hereditary Prince of Reichstein," was the reply; "and this is my foster-brother and attendant."

Whereupon the harsh laugh that the boys had heard before came again, louder than the wolfish howling of the wind.

"And I?" cried the tall horseman. "Does your serenity know my name and standing also?"

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"I cannot see the badge upon your shield nor yet the crest upon your helm," answered the boy; "for the snow has covered them. But I can guess that you are the Sovereign Count of Ehrlich."

Again the knight laughed.

"Rudolph, Hereditary Prince of Reichstein, is overfar from home this wintry afternoon," the Count of Ehrlich said, with a low bow of mock courtesy; "and the open forest is no place for him and his attendant, so I must needs constrain his serenity to bear me company to my poor castle of Drachensberg."

"As a hostage?" asked the little Prince, unflinchingly.

"As a hostage. The Hereditary Prince is quicker-witted than his father, it would seem."

Rudolph turned to Ludwig.

"It is no use for two boys to try to resist three men," he said quietly; "and it seems the Count of Erhlich makes war on children, so, Ludwig, we must be fain to go with them."

The two attendants of the White Dragon seized each a rein of the boys' bridles, and off they set again, soon turning down a bypath to the north, the grim Count riding on alone behind. And thicker and thicker fell the great white flakes of snow, wiping out the hoof-prints of the horses and every trace of the way whereby the stolen children had been taken.

When Drachensberg was reached, it was five o'clock, and supper was laid out on an immense table in the castle hall. It was so bitter cold outside that, though it was the house of an enemy, the boys were almost glad to get into its shelter; and they were very hungry, for it was six hours since they had broken their fast. On the table of dais, overhung by a canopy of green velvet, with the huge dragon broidered thereon in silver, were laid two places, and to these a third was now added.

In his chair of state Count Ehrlich flung himself in moody silence. He signed to the seat at his left hand. Rudolph took it without protest, Ludwig going to the table below the salt. But for some minutes the seat upon the Count's right hand remained empty. Then a curtain close to the hearth was lifted, and a little blue-eyed maiden of eight summers stole into the hall and

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shyly took her place beside her father. For the Count of Ehrlich was a widower, like his former rival, the Prince of Reichstein. Having married a year later, he lost his wife a few years after the birth of their one child, this fair-haired daughter.

IV

When the snow began to fall, Conrad was himself absent from the Castle of Reichstein. He had ridden forth with a party of his knights to visit a vassal and kinsman who lay sick in his castle at Neustadt, several leagues away to the eastward. He did not return till after nightfall, and then first learned of the boys' continued absence.

"Perhaps it had begun to snow before they left the woodman's cottage," he said, "and Gertrude thought wise to keep them."

His attendants agreed, saying they had sent messengers to the woodcutter's to make inquiry as to them. But at last these messengers themselves returned with no tidings of the children except that they had set forth from the cottage some time before the storm began. The messengers had indeed met Franz, who had followed the boys when the snow came on, and, not finding any trace of them, was comforting himself with the belief that they had arrived safe home.

All that night search-parties with lanterns and torches scoured the forest for leagues around, but no clue of the boys could be found. At dawn running messengers were sent to every town and fortress that owned the sway of the Black Prince of Reichstein, to tell of the disappearance of the Hereditary Prince and his attendant, and to demand aid in the search. And at dawn the Prince, surrounded by his knights, went to hear Mass in the castle chapel and pray for the boys' return.

Breakfast was eaten standing and in silence in the castle hall that was so wont to ring with the merry laughter of the boys. And then the great bell of the church of the Holy Spirit began to toll, calling all together from castle and burg to assist at a High Mass of special supplication, sung by the Lord Abbot of Engelbach, Prince Friedrich of Reichstein, uncle of the reigning Prince.

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The next day a similar Mass was sung. But this time there was more of solemn pomp, for from each of the two score towns that owned the Black Prince's sway came delegates to condole with him in the mysterious sorrow that had fallen upon his house and to offer such aid as they could in the search for the lost heir. All these assisted in robes and collars of state at the High Mass, and in solemn procession they preceded their Prince when the Office was over, and the assistants filed slowly out in sad and solemn silence into the Hofplatz.

When all were without the church there was a stir among them, for it was whispered that the Lord Abbot was himself coming forth to address them. And soon he appeared.

Standing at the topmost step of the great broad flight that led up from the Hofplatz to the doorway of the abbey church, holding his crosier, and with his jewelled mitre resting on his venerable brow, he spoke to the assembled knights of the League of the Golden Horseshoe, to the Delegates of the Feudatory Towns, and to the weeping people. He alluded to their common sorrow, and simply reminded them of God's unfailing providence. Then lifting his withered hand, tremulous from age, but ever firm to rule, to chasten, and to support, he pointed to the great statue beside him, the shadow of whose outspread wings was cast by the wintry sun upon his face.

"In God's great hand we stand," he said; "and in all fourscore years He hath never failed me. His love and care have held me from my childhood to this day. And so hath it been, I doubt not, with each one of you, my lord and children. He hath given His angels charge of us; and most of all His little ones are in their care. Pray now to Him, and entreat of Him to send the Guardian Angel of our town and race to aid the children that we have lost."

He spoke of no bronze and marble statue; but as he spoke of the invisible spirit his hand pointed to the visible figure of it. And from all who heard him there rose a strong and swelling murmur of eager approbation; and forth from out the rest stood the Burgomaster of Engelbach himself, a man of reverend age and venerable presence.

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"My lord Abbot," he cried, "we thank you all for your timely reminder! And here, in the name of all, I promise that if God will suffer His angel to guide and help us in our search, so that we may find again the hope of our Prince's house, then, in token of our gratitude, shall this great statue be crowned with a diadem of purest gold, set with richest gems, whose splendour shall preach to all coming ages of the wealth of our gratefulness for God's goodness and His angel's help."

Not less earnest was the assent that greeted this brief speech, until the voice of all the gathered crowd uprose in one great "*Hoch!*" that rent the wintry sky.

V

Forth from the Hofplatz scattered the crowd, each town's delegates choosing of their number to send in search far and wide through all the country round. And meanwhile in the Castle of the White Dragon the two boys were held captive. It would have been little strange if they were afraid. Wild and dreadful tales were common then in the Thuringian Forest, and ruthless deeds of vengeance done on innocent victims.

But Rudolph's heart was pure and stout, and Ludwig caught the noble contagion of his proud bravery. Never once had the young Prince been pert or defiant to his fierce captor; but never once had he betrayed one jot of fear for him, or need of his good-will. To the little Countess Freda, Rudolph was ever courteous and full of sweet respect; but even with her he sought no intimacy, and held himself aloof. The grim dragon watched all; and had the boy been over-anxious to make friendship with the girl, he would have called all policy, and sneered at it bitterly. So the life of the two prisoners was very dull and full of anxious thought.

The fourth day after that on which the boys were lost was Sunday, and all the people of Engelbach were gathered together in the great church of the Holy Spirit, to assist at Vespers and to hear a sermon by the prior of the Dominican church in the Brodgasse. It was already dark, but it seemed as if all the snow had fallen out of the sky, in whose steel-blue dome the broad, white, hunter's

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moon was riding. Every roof and spire, decked with unstained snow, glittered in her cold silver radiance. There was not a breath of wind, so that from far away the dead silence of the night was broken by every sound—the baying of a watch-dog from some distant farm, the cry of the wild duck among the sedges of the river, and now and then the " whit-to-whoo " of the owls from the trees by the castle.

At length the evening Office was over, and the dense crowd came pouring out of the abbey-church on to the Hofplatz. But one by one, as they came, the people started back astonished; and each pointed to his neighbour, bidding him note that on the white marble pedestal before the church porch stood no angel-statue. It was true! The great bronze angel was gone; and there, empty, was the base on which for long centuries it had braved wintry storm and weather.

Swiftly the word was passed from mouth to mouth; and no one went homeward, but all stood about the immense square, discussing in awestruck tones the wonder that had taken place. Surely the House of Reichstein must be tottering to its fall. First its heir vanished, and now its tutelary guardian gone!

A kind of dismay crept through all hearts. It seemed as if their prayers had been disregarded and disapproved. They had with all solemnity made special supplication for the assistance of the Angel Guardian of their little city and their Prince's race, and the angel's statue itself was unaccountably removed.

And now on the moonlit square were gathered all the inhabitants of Engelbach—prince and prelate, abbot, prior, and monk, craftsman and burgesses, Knights of the Golden Horseshoe, dame and serving-woman. And suddenly on them all fell a hush of awestruck, wondering silence. Far, far away over the night-wrapped Thuringian Forest shone a soft, yet brilliant, splendour—a glory that was not of moon or star—" the light that never was on sea or land." And this light, like a thin cloud of unearthly brightness, came floating swift, yet unhurried, southward to the town. Then softly crept upon the ears of the listening throng a melody such as was heard in Bethlehem in the wintry fields on the first Christmas night—a

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harmony soft as the zephyr of a summer noon yet clear and strong. It had no words—at least, none that mortal ears could tell—only a divine concord of sweet sounds that pierced the soul and brimmed the eyes with happy tears.

Nearer and nearer floated that tender silver cloud, that never rose from mead or lea until it was hung, like a great folding veil, above the town, when it melted like the summer dew in the risen sun's warmth and splendour. And, from whence it had been, there came flying down to earth the Angel of Engelbach, guardian of the children of the race of Rechstein, his wings widespread, one arm pointing upward, but the other folded on his breast. It was as if that waiting throng had but one heart, that panted with a bursting joy and exultation. None spoke, but from three thousand throats burst forth a pent-up sigh of unspeakable relief.

In the sight of all, the angel lighted down again into his place, his feet touching the marble pedestal as soft and silently as if they had been of down; his head was bowed tenderly upon his breast, and in his protecting arm, close nestled against his shoulder, lay sleeping the two lost children—the hope of the princely race of Reichstein, and the son of the simple woodcutter of the forest.

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THE MADONNA OF LANDEN

PERHAPS you have never been to Landen? You may have seen the glories of the sunset on Himalayan peaks, whose white teeth are reddened with the day's death-blood; or the sun which never sets at all, all summer long, at Hammerfest; and yet the chances are that you have never set foot in the narrow valley of Landen.

It is not over-easy to reach, and yet it is not so very far away. The best plan is to walk from Baden-Baden over the Hornisgründe, and so to Allerheiligen, where you can procure lodging at the once great Premonstratensian Abbey, whence long since the White Canons have been driven out. For Landen was a dependency of Allerheiligen, and a few hours' walk up into the forest will bring you to it.

The small, nameless river that flows along the valley, and will ultimately find its way to the great Rhine somewhere out on the plain of Strasburg, is surrounded by pleasant pastures and cool thickets, white with *spiræa;* and these fields are bordered by the advanced guards of the actual forest. Close by the left bank of the river the road winds, with now and then a great painted post beside it, like a huge sugar-stick, to mark the boundaries of the Grand Duchy and the Kingdom of Würtemberg; and now and then also an elaborate Calvary of painted wood, with Judas and his money-bag, St. Peter and his keys, and the local saint with proper emblem.

About halfway up the valley is a little detached hill, or mound, crowned with what was once the Monastery of Our Lady of the Wood, and is now the Hôtel du Roi de Würtemberg. Long ago its last exiled monk was laid to rest under the shadow of trees all unlike the odorous pines of his own valleys; and now weedy Alsacian waiters, chronically evening-dressed, lounge and chatter

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in the cloisters where he held a meditative silence. In the prior's cell the thrifty hostess augments her reckonings, and in the great, cool refectory sit baronesses and cowring princes.

The chapel alone is undesecrated, for the merciful storms of a century have reduced it to less incongruous ruin; and one can see how beautiful it was once, though it must always have been of plain exterior, and perhaps of no great merit architecturally. The green grass is its only pavement now, and the blue floor of God's heaven its sole roofing; but a few patches of fresco on the walls suggest past beauties, and some of the empty windows show still a little rude tracery. Over the high altar is a large, smooth space, where formerly was to be seen the miraculous picture of Landen.

Many of the peasants in the valleys round about have brightly coloured prints, which they claim to be copies of the original painting. These prints show a grave-eyed Teutonic maiden, with smooth flaxen hair, and fair, sweet face, holding two children in her arms, neither of whom bears any likeness to the typical Christ-child, who lies smiling at her feet. Behind is a rude representation of the forest on a wild, wintry night—the driving snow standing out against the blackness of the pine trees, and almost obscuring the light of a pale, cold moon. The following is, in brief, the history of the Madonna of Landen.

There was at Allerheiligen, in the very height of its prosperity, a certain monk called Rudolph, who had been Count of Ottenhöfen, but who, hearing read the Gospel wherein Christ said to the young man, "One thing thou lackest," had left all to his brother, and put on the habit of religion. The young monk made rapid progress in perfection, and was noted for his tender charity, which led him to see in all men but the counterpart and representatives of his divine Master. The poor and wretched for miles around were wont to come to him in all their miseries, and he was frequently to be found in their huts, dressing loathsome wounds, making savoury messes with his own hands, and performing the most menial and toilsome labours for the old and helpless, who were unable to do anything for themselves.

One winter a great famine came upon the Schwarzwald,

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and many of the forest people died; but in the valleys round Allerheiligen the poor were well cared for. The Lord Abbot daily gave large alms of bread to all who appeared at the gate; while the good monks carried provisions and fuel to the sick and aged, who were not able to leave their homes.

But about this time a great sorrow fell upon the monks themselves; their beloved abbot, who had governed the monastery for almost half a century, was called to his reward, and the loss was deeply felt by his bereaved children. However, when the precious remains had been laid to rest under the chancel floor, and a chapter had been held in order to appoint a successor, all the monks were filled with joy to find Rudolph chosen to replace the saintly abbot; although the good Brother was still young, and had never before held an office in the house.

Of all the community, only one monk was grieved at the choice, and that was Rudolph. Nevertheless, he obeyed, and bent his shoulder in meek submission to the burden that had been laid upon him, although he was very sad at heart. "Not for a jewelled mitre did I lay down my helmet of plain steel," he said within himself; "but rather to be the last soldier in the army of our great Captain, Christ." The keys of the monastery were harder to carry than he had ever found his long sword or spear, and the cross of silver and gold he now bore upon his breast was the heaviest cross that had ever been laid upon him. Yet so well and wisely did he govern the great abbey that, as a sweet odour draweth bees, even so did the reputation of his sanctity draw many youths to his quiet retreat. So great, indeed, was the increase of postulants that it was found necessary to build a new house in order to accommodate them.

The remote valley of Landen was chosen as the hive where the new swarm should take up their abode; and, when the building was finished, certain of the brethren from Allerheiligen were sent to found the new house, among whom was Rudolph. "I have borne," he said, "the yoke of government patiently until now; suffer me, then, to go in peace, to bear a little severity and hardship in this our new home; and choose you a better ruler to be over you—one who has well learned to obey;

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for only he who has been long in subjection is fit to govern others." So they suffered him to go; and because he had borne rule (for such, humility is more needful) he was set to cook for the brethren, in which capacity he laboured both diligently and gladly, and gave entire satisfaction.

Now, everything at Landen was poor and simple. Even the chapel, though a large, beautiful building, was very plain in its decorations; it contained but two altars, without any paintings. Over the high altar was a great space, where, in time, some pious artist might be tempted to exercise his skill. Rudolph often looked at this vacant spot, and longed to see it filled with a beautiful representation of some scene from the life of our Divine Lord or His Blessed Mother; but for the present there was no hope of seeing his wish realised; he must wait and pray.

However, in the second year of the foundation, a young man—a painter of considerable merit—presented himself at the monastery door, and Rudolph looked upon the new-comer as a messenger from Heaven, in answer to his long and earnest prayers. Brother Willibrord was set to paint the great space above the altar. He began by drawing an outline of his subject, and then filled in a little of the colouring, leaving the background all confused. The monks on coming to the chapel always looked curiously to see how he was progressing, and at last he had finished Our Lady with the Divine Child in her arms. There remained to be executed only the scenery behind the figure and the ground beneath its feet.

"In the background I shall paint Allerheiligen," said the artist, "and make it appear as though the Blessed Virgin were coming thence to Landen, holding the Christ-child in her arms." But Brother Willibrord never painted thus, as we shall see in the sequel.

* * * * * *

One night in midwinter, when the snow lay thick and deep throughout the valleys of the forest, the monk Rudolph went to pray in the chapel, when his kitchen work was done; and, being wearied therewith, he soon fell asleep. How long he slept he knew not, but when he awoke the lamps were extinguished, and only that

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before the high altar was still burning. Its mild radiance fell on the plain altar of rough-hewn stone, on the monks' stalls, and on the unfinished picture on the wall. Rudolph knelt in a dark corner apart, and so it happened that he had not been noticed by those who had come to put out the lights in the chapel.

He presently arose, and, passing before the altar, genuflected, and was about to turn away, when his eyes fell once more on the picture behind it. Then he stood still in wonderment. The Christ-child was there, lying on the ground and smiling, as He raised His tiny hand to bless; but the *Gottes-Mutter* was gone, and Rudolph saw only the background, rough and confused. He looked long, in doubt of his senses, but the picture remained the same: Our Lady was not there, and the Divine Infant lay smiling on the ground.

While Rudolph stood thus, wondering and astonished, he became aware that a cold draught was blowing on his face, and causing the red lamp of the sanctuary to flicker nervously. He went therefore across the choir toward the sacristy, the low, arched door of which he found ajar, and passing thence into a narrow cloister running round the eastern portion of the chapel, came to another postern opening into the monks' garden. This also stood ajar, and through it the cold air of the winter night came strong and keen. More and more was the good monk filled with astonishment and fear, for seldom was this postern opened at all, and never left unlocked through the night. It was not snowing now, and the pale, full moon stared down out of a steel-blue sky upon the forest.

Rudolph went out a few paces, and looked around for sight or sound of aught unusual that might explain the strange occurrence; but all lay still as death, wrapped in the white mantle of the winter night. He was slowly going back into the monastery, his head bent in thought, when he noticed that there were other footprints in the snow beside his own; they were small and light, like a woman's, and were turned away from the abbey toward the forest. He followed them some distance, and they did not cease; up the hillside they led him, off the main cart-road, and into one of the narrow tracks that lead to the thickest of the wood. Here it was often too dark

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to see the footprints, but still Rudolph walked on patiently till he came to a place where the moonlight fell again upon the path, and then he found the small footmarks ever pointing forward into the forest.

For an hour he followed them, and now he was quite in the recesses of the great pine forest. Suddenly the night-silence was broken by a sound that held his heart still, and made his pulses cease to beat. Down the mountain-side from about a mile away there came, on the clear, still air, the baying of many wolves. Where Rudolph stood it was pitch dark; the pines were thick around, and their black arms were twined together overhead; but a hundred yards in the distance he could see the moonlight on the snow. Should he go backward, or stay here in the darkness, and climb one of the trees, to be in safety from the wolves? or go forward, and see if the footprints still continued? Onward toward the white light and toward the wolves the monk went, making the Sign of the Cross, and praying as he approached.

On drawing nearer to the place where the moonlight fell, he saw some one coming to meet him out of the blackness beyond. At first the shadows were about their way, and he could not distinguish whether it were man or woman; but soon the figure came out into the moonlight, and he saw it was a lady, tall and stately, with raiment of glistening white, and a mantle like the blue waters of the summer sea; and in her arms she held two little children, whom she pressed against her shoulders lovingly.

In the shadow of the pines the monk Rudolph stood still in reverent wonderment, his eyes fastened on the vision before him. Full well he knew that dazzling raiment, and that sapphire veil, and those kind mother-eyes of the Lady coming to meet him. It was the *Gottes-Mutter* of the picture Brother Willibrord was painting.

For a few moments, that were to the monk Rudolph as a thousand years, he watched her as she approached; then, falling down upon his knees, he covered his face with his hands, and did not dare to look. Presently there came upon the night-air the noise of far-off bells, as of the chime from all the steeples of a Gothic town, and Rudolph raised his head to hear. Just by him in the

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snow two small children stood watching him, hand-in-hand, and waiting for him to uncover his face and speak. But the Lady had left them and was gone.

"Carry us!" the children begged; and, rising from his knees, Rudolph lifted them in his arms, and turned homeward, with the pair nestled against his heart.

The noise of those unearthly bells came no more through the listening air, but soon there was again the cry of the wolves, which grew more distant as Rudolph hurried on. Still he seemed to keep pace, and it was wonderful how swiftly he sped homeward with the sleeping children in his arms. It was not till he reached the open space between the forest and the monastery that he could hear the trampling of the wolves through the thicket, and knew that now, at all events, they were upon his track. How long those last few hundred paces seemed! He hardly dared to look around, and when he did he saw the black forms of the wolves bounding over the snow.

Onward, onward he pressed, and the children were wakened by his speed. The wolves gained step by step; he could hear their panting now; and still the postern was not reached. Great God, if it should be shut! Perhaps the wind had blown it to; it lay in black darkness, and he could not see. Onward, quicker—the postern was all but reached; he would surely be in time. But, nay! he stumbled, and tripped, and fell headlong forward, and the wolves drew on apace. Something surely lifted him up; how else rose he so swiftly? Again he flew forward, like the wind that whistled in his ears. The wolves were hardly a dozen paces from him now, and the postern door was half a dozen still in front. Oh, God, if it should be shut! For all the heat of his running, an icy sweat burst out upon him at the mere chance of that horror; and his eyes were well-nigh strained from looking forward into the dark shadow, but he could not see.

On, on, on; his feet were on the lowest step, but, ah! dear God! the oaken door was shut! Its panels filled the arched doorway, and lay against the doorsills all around. In frozen, icy despair, the monk Rudolph almost turned to face the foe. Was not that less terrible than to press against that sullen door, and be overtaken

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vainly knocking, where there was none to answer? But, by Christ's dear grace, he did not; hoping against dead hope, he stumbled forward, and fell against the door—and, joy! it yielded; it but lay to, and was not shut. Into the cloister he fell forward, and even that fall well-nigh cost him all. Before the door was quite closed, the wolves were leaping at the threshold. The cloister was narrow, and with his feet thrust against the wall opposite, Rudolph pushed with all his might, and held the door against them, while he sent the two children to ring the great bell in the chapel, and rouse the brethren withal.

Soon through the dim chapel and dimmer cloister the religious came to aid him. The door was pressed to and locked secure; then together they passed into the chapel, and sang the *Te Deum* in the silent night. As their eyes were raised to the picture over the high altar, greatly were the monks astonished; for the Christ-child lay smiling in the snow, and the *Gottes-Mutter* held two children in her arms.

The rescued little ones themselves (who had been lost and benighted in the grim forest) were taken back on the morrow to their home, where they remained until they were of age. Then both of them took the habit of religion in the Monastery of Our Lady of the Wood, at Landen, where, in great observance, they lived to a blessed age.

This is the legend of the miraculous picture of Landen.

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THE SAVING OF PRIVATE RICH *

I

SOME people found it hard to understand the popularity of Colonel Tregorrick. He was, they said, exactly the sort of man that is generally *not* popular among soldiers, and no doubt they knew best—best about that I mean. If they meant to imply that he was not really liked by his own regiment they were utterly at sea there.

These persons said Colonel Tregorrick was too religious—too religious, that is, to be the kind of officer admired by his men. And he was religious, it must be admitted. And it can be easily admitted, too, that there is a sort of religious officer whom the men cannot abide. Of course, I am not speaking of a humbug, but of a genuinely religious man. One sort of these, there is no denying, soldiers hate: the sort that lacks tact, and has only zeal without discretion. As regards your own individual soul and its interests, very likely it is better to have too much zeal than too much discretion; but if it's a question of doing good outside yourself, and the people outside happen to be soldiers, you do twice as much with a fair amount of zeal, and any quantity of discretion, than you will with all the zeal in the world and no discretion.

I have known very good men who were very bad officers, though I have known very few really bad men who made good officers. Well, these good men had no tact and no judgment. Their piety was always conspicuous on the right front when it ought to have been out of sight on the left rear. And they were so eager to do good that they did a world of harm. Let any man talk piously to them and they would believe him to be

* It will be seen that this is a very "old-army" story.

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a wingless angel! And they were certainly right about the wings! These angels were short of wings—and a good many other features in an angelic outfit. But they succeeded in humbugging these good officers, and all the regiment saw that they had.

Now, when soldiers see an officer humbugged they do not, as they justly should, feel angry with the impostor who does it, they merely think the officer a fool for his pains and despise him for it. Mind you, I don't say they are right in having this way of looking at it, but they have it; and any officer who wants to do good among them must take it into account. For if the better sort of soldier sees that a rank impostor is petted and encouraged ("dry-nursed" is the regimental name for it) by some chaplain or officer because of his plausibility, these better sort fight shy of the whole thing. That is why a chaplain often finds it hardest to make any way with the decentest men he has to do with.

Now to get back to Colonel Tregorrick.

He was distinctly religious, and when I say that I do not mean that he was at all perfect. He knew, himself, that he had lots of faults, and in the main he did try to improve them, but sometimes he did not try hard enough. He was of a passionate and irritable nature, and he did not always control his hot temper, though he generally did. He took very strong likes and dislikes —often with no better ground than a face to go upon, and sometimes he was wrong, though I think he was singularly often right. When he was wrong, it naturally made him unjust. If afterwards he found himself out in such a mistake, he would loyally try to correct it, not glossing over his having been wrong in his judgment, far less face it out, to look consistent; but when we discover our mistakes it is often too late to alter their results, and if they have caused injustice anywhere that injustice is past our remedy.

And sometimes, perhaps, Colonel Tregorrick's mistakes never were discovered.

Nevertheless, it was precisely on account of his singular justice that they liked him. The men knew well that no military fault, great or small, would be excused in a man because he happened to be pious (or to seem so).

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And they knew that promotion would come to a man, if he deserved it, for his regimental virtues, even though he had no other virtues to boast of.

And they saw that the colonel was hardly ever deceived —never by any soft sawder or show of piety.

He was rather strict in his punishments—far stricter than the second in command or the adjutant—but he punished the right men. There are men in every regiment who are always being punished, and it is all nonsense to make them out mere victims of ill-luck who are very good fellows at bottom. The soldiers who are constantly in the cells are in their right place there, only it's a pity the punishment is not harder. The best soldier slips occasionally, but he will have to slip more than once or twice before his commanding officer will send him to the provost-sergeant.

"I dare say," said the colonel, "you wonder at my giving Private Rich another chance."

To tell the truth the adjutant had wondered. They were in the orderly room and had been telling off prisoners. It was finished now, and they were alone, writing.

"He used to be a very good soldier," observed the adjutant, as if accounting for the colonel's patience with the man in question.

"Yes; he was quite up to the average; never 'exemplary,' you know."

"Oh no. He's never had quite a clean sheet, but formerly he came up very seldom, and they were really all company entries."

"He has had plenty of regimental entries lately," said the colonel, "and his general conduct, by what I can see, is deteriorated."

It was quite true. The adjutant's servant was in the same company as Private Rich, and the adjutant's servant was talkative.

The opinion in the company was that Private Rich was going to the dogs fast and irretrievably. But not a word of this had the adjutant breathed to any one, and he wondered how the colonel knew.

"He has never been right since he lost his stripe," remarked the adjutant.

"He certainly had gone very wrong before he did lose

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it. As to that, I had my doubts always of his making a very good N.C.O., but his company officers wanted it. I am certain he might make a good soldier."

For some minutes no more was said and there was only the sound of the pens travelling over the blue paper. The adjutant was writing to the Presbyterian chaplain, who wanted a new groom. It appeared that his present groom wished to return to his duty, which did not make the adjutant think the billet could be a very "soft" one, and now another soldier was to be detailed, and the chaplain's requirements were difficult to fulfil. The man must be a Presbyterian, of excellent character, sober, intelligent, obliging, and of smart appearance; his height must be five feet eight inches and three-quarters, chest measurement thirty-nine and a half inches, or else he would not fit the late groom's civilian clothes, etc. It was not easy to find such a man; there were very few Presbyterians in the regiment, and so the choice was narrow; none of these had the right chest measurement combined with such other qualities as the chaplain insisted on. That chest measurement seemed particularly criminal —all the men who had it had also recent regimental entries on their defaulter-sheets.

The adjutant had originally suggested that the groom should be sought among the Marquis of Lorne's Lochaber Rifles, which lay at Devonport, and had, of course, hundreds of Presbyterians to choose from. But the chaplain belonged to a clan that had been at feud with the Campbells for seven centuries, and would not hear of it.

The colonel was writing to the P.M.O., who wanted to come over and smell the drains in the Citadel. The colonel would rather that the P.M.O. did so than that he should himself be asked to do it; but a good many P.M.O.'s had inaugurated their command of the medical staff in the Western District by coming to smell those drains, and they had all arrived at the most unflattering conclusions in respect of them. Then the Royal Engineers had been appealed to to make new drains, and the C.R.E. had generously offered to put new door-handles on all the doors in A and B blocks and the married quarters, but intimated that he had not enough money to grapple with the drain question. So the colonel was not really

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excited by the proposed visit of this new P.M.O. to smell those drains.

"Well," observed the colonel when he had finished his memo., "I couldn't make up my mind to give him up as a bad job yet, so I gave him another chance, you see."

"Private Rich?"

"Yes. Why did he lose his stripe? Was it a love affair?"

Now, the adjutant, being a first-rate adjutant, was not at all imaginative. He could not see how a lance-corporal should lose his stripe by means of a love affair. Falling in love is not a military offence, according to the Queen's Regulations of the present date, even without the permission of commanding officers, though getting married, of course, is.

But the colonel had a marvellous memory.

"Shortly after he got the stripe, Rich applied for permission to marry."

"Yes, sir, I remember something about it. It was accorded, I think."

"That's it. He never did get married. Find out why, and I'll tell you how he began going wrong."

The adjutant did find out.

"Didn't Private Rich, of A Company, get married a few months back?" he inquired innocently of the loquacious Private Chubb, his servant.

"He were goin' to, sir, but she left him in the lurch—the gal what he'd been courtin', sir."

"Oh."

"Yes, sir; she married Colour-Sergeant Rodd, of F Company."

Next morning the adjutant conveyed this intelligence to the C.O.

"Ah!" observed the colonel, quietly finishing his letter—one to the general, who of late had hotly taken up a scheme for providing the soldiers with four meat meals a day out of the same money that hitherto supplied about three-quarters of one.

"You know," he said when he had signed it, "if you were engaged to be married you would not like it if your lady were to marry the second-in-command without consulting your wishes in the matter."

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(Brevet Lieut.-Colonel Spooner was generally credited with a desire to marry some one.)

The adjutant grinned. He was not at all a love-sick officer.

"I doubt if it would make me lose the adjutancy," he observed in allusion to the effect of such a blow on Private Rich.

"It might so affect you as to give me great dissatisfaction."

"Then I should lose the adjutancy, that's very certain."

II

The colonel was walking up the hill that leads to the Citadel from the Barbican, and as it happened he was thinking of Private Rich.

Now, he had been much more disturbed on this man's account than may have appeared from his half cynical way of speaking about him. He felt sure that the man was rapidly deteriorating, not merely regimentally but morally. In the main, Colonel Tregorrick's opinion of soldiers was a good deal higher than that ordinarily held of them by civilians. He knew it was nonsense to suppose that soldiers are mostly drunken or immoral. But he knew that often a soldier is bad, and when bad brutally and, to all seeming, irredeemably so. By nature he did not think Private Rich was bad. He thought his face told of a good disposition; he had, however, begun to fear that the man would rapidly become bad, and in his face also the colonel thought there were signs suggestive of a ready fall towards badness of one particular sort.

Now, Colonel Tregorrick was in some things old-fashioned. He not only believed in heaven, but he believed very definitely in hell also. He was certain that God's rewards would not fail those who had toiled and fought to win them; he was equally sure they would not be squandered on those who had never fought, or who had deserted out of the battle.

And this definiteness of belief brought him frequent sadness. He would not comfort himself with an easy lazy optimism that flatters itself it is the charity that thinketh no evil. And so he sometimes could see no comfort

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at all. Underneath his somewhat frigid exterior he had a measureless love for his regiment, a pride far too deep for mere verbal vaunting, and a personal tenderness for every officer, man, or boy in it. He had an immense sense of his responsibility to God and the Queen on their account, and, being unable to deceive himself any more than any one else, he was now and then sick with sorrow. How could he believe it was well with that man?

There is always God's unutterable and astonishing kindness to trust to, but he had a feeling that it would be a sort of laziness and dereliction of duty to trust blindly to it in any individual instance.

And now he was afraid for this man Rich—unless he could be stopped somehow.

Presently the colonel became aware of a difference of opinion in front of him. The opinion on one side was that a staggering, panting, quivering horse, all skin and bone, and with a very decided raw on one shoulder, was well able to pull up a very heavy load of coals to the top of the Citadel-hill. This opinion was that of a brutal-looking man with an unpleasing obliquity of vision, suggestive of obliquity of conduct to correspond, who was digging the wretched beast in the ribs (which were particularly easy to find) with a whip-handle. The opinion, on the other side, was to the contrary effect, and was held by the horse, and by a soldier who seemed to have a considerable facility for expressing it.

The colonel found himself unable to approve the terms in which this latter opinion was couched, but entirely certain as to the correctness of the opinion itself.

He passed ahead of the disputants. One of those holding the last-mentioned opinion was a soldier. Catching sight of the colonel, he abruptly stood to attention and saluted. It was Private Rich.

The last words the colonel had interrupted were these—

"... As sure as death I'll set the Society for Cruelty to Animals on you. You think I don't know yer name and address! *I* remember you, Mr. 'Erbert Slammer, of 87A, Fish Street, Barbican, what I caught making jelly of his little lad's 'ed a month back, only I made pudden of yourn instead, I fancy. ..."

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Then the salute came, and Private Rich's sarcasms died on his lips.

III

The colonel came into the orderly room where the adjutant was already at work.

"I also shall want a groom," he said, "but he needn't be a Presbyterian, and I'm not particular about his chest measurement. Private Currie has gone sick, and they say it looks like scarlatina. He'll be seven weeks in hospital, and then he'll want a sick furlough; it'll be two or three months before I can get him back, and his time is in soon, I fancy."

"His time will be in in about three months," said the adjutant; "is there anybody you know of yourself, sir, as his relief?"

"I think of trying Private Rich," replied the colonel.

Now, the adjutant had a theory that no event would ever surprise us if we knew the cause of it. So he generally took everything as it came, without any astonishment, merely concluding that the causes were beyond him. On the present occasion he nearly forgot his theory, and looked surprised.

"So, after all," added the colonel, laughing, "I shan't give you so much trouble as the Presbyterian chaplain to find me a relief."

"It's very good of you," the adjutant could not help saying.

"To save you so much trouble?"

They both laughed; the adjutant had not meant that. When prisoners had been told off, the colonel recurred to the subject.

"I told you there was love at the bottom of the trouble. I am going to try a mild homœopathic treatment."

The adjutant forgot all about his theory and stared. The colonel could not be going in for match-making!

"Yes, I'm going to try love, administered in minute doses, and in a different form." The colonel was not above enjoying the adjutant's perplexity. "I have discovered that Private Rich has a strong love for horses—and for children."

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"Oh!" The adjutant began to see daylight. "I understand about the groom arrangement now, sir, and Trigs is going to help?"

Now, Trigs was an institution in the regiment. He was the colonel's only child, and I shall have to explain about him.

Colonel Tregorrick was a widower, and those who knew him best said he would never get used to it. He had worshipped his lovely young wife with all the silent depth of a strong and vehement nature, and God had abruptly taken her. Colonel Tregorrick made no cry, for that was not his nature, but he bled inwardly.

There was one little son, who in baptism received the name of Reginald, which was the colonel's. But he was usually known as Trigs—a sort of corruption and abbreviation of his surname. Gradually even the child's father had slipped into the custom and called him Trigs also.

People whose idea of army life is derived from the military novelette of the present day would suppose that the married officers' children spend half their time in the ante-room. The truth is they are never seen in it. And in the main they are seen very little anywhere by the unmarried officers.

But Trigs had an exceptional position: having no mother to restrain him, he ranged at large through barracks, a good deal more than any officer's child. And, though he never showed his nose in the ante-room, or, indeed, anywhere in the mess, he paid occasional visits to the bachelor-officers in their quarters, and was extremely intimate with most of them.

"I intend," asserted the colonel, "to hand him over almost entirely to Trigs. I have great confidence in him."

Of course, nothing was said to the child as to what was expected of him.

Private Rich was sent for and asked if he would like to take over groom to the colonel, Private Currie having gone sick, etc.

Private Rich flushed furiously. These things are usually given to specially good men and are regarded as a reward of conduct. Private Rich was conscious that he had less than no claim for consideration.

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"The colonel says he understood from you that you had had to do with horses and knew groom's work?"

"Yes, sir; my father had livery stables. I've been brought up among 'em."

The adjutant nodded.

"All right," he said; "try and keep your billet now you've got it. It'll be your own fault if you lose it. It's the colonel's own choice, mind you; I should not have ventured to recommend you as groom to any officer after the way things have been going lately."

"The colonel won't regret it, sir."

"He'll be very glad if he doesn't have to," said the adjutant epigrammatically. "Well, you can take over at once; I'll put you in orders at once."

When orders came out there was considerable surprise at the appointment.

"It won't pay," remarked the youngest subaltern sagely, speaking with all the weight of seven months' service. "When I first joined *I* tried giving a chap a chance—Private Slick, of D Company—who'd been going wrong, they told me. But he was a smart-looking fellow and an excellent drill; I took him as servant. Well, you know, he pawned my shirts and full-dress uniform, and deserted. Trigs-major's making a mistake."

Trigs-major was the regimental name for the colonel.

"You'd better explain it to him," said the adjutant blandly. "Tell him to be guided by experience."

IV

Trigs minor and Private Rich were soon fast friends.

The opinions of Private Rich were constantly being quoted to every officer with whom the child happened to talk. It became quite a recognised pleasantry, when any one was in doubt, for his brother officers to suggest consulting Private Rich.

"Bother! I don't know what to do about this company shooting-club," some one would say; "I wonder what Private Rich would do in my position?"

To Private Rich, on the other hand, Trigs quoted the colonel.

"I asked my papa if you were a good man. I asked

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him twice before he answered," observed the child one day. He was sitting on the cornbin in the stable, nursing his knee, as he had seen his father do. Private Rich was cleaning the colonel's charger.

Trigs wished he would not hiss so, it interfered with conversation.

Private Rich grinned.

"He said you were not quite perfect," added Trigs candidly.

Private Rich grinned harder than ever.

"Well, no!" he admitted. "We can't all be so good as the colonel, Master Trigs, you know."

"Of course," assented Trigs, as though he considered such goodness as his father's could hardly be even aimed at without presumption on the part of other people. But," he added, with another burst of candour, "Private Rainford says you get drunk."

Trigs's bursts of candour were sometimes rather embarrassing. Private Rich was evidently embarrassed by this one.

"Private Rainford's a very ignorant soldier," he observed with some confusion.

Private Rainford was the colonel's orderly; a blameless young man who had been much scandalised at the encouragement of the abandoned Rich. He had, by the way, a second-class certificate.

"Sometimes," says Trigs, "I think you tell stories."

"Me!"

"I asked you why your hair was so little—and you had no parting; you told me it was because you had headache and couldn't bear it long. Private Rainford says the Provost-Sergeant cut it all off, because you'd been bad and sent to cells. Why did you tell me a story?"

"That was only a—compromise!" said Rich, who rather liked long words.

"I wish you'd give up telling compromises."

There was a pause.

"If you aren't good you won't go to heaven," observed Trigs judicially.

But Private Rich manifested no symptoms of alarm.

"They won't be very down on a poor soldier," he

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remarked cheerfully, jerking his head towards the hayloft to indicate the powers above. "They'll let us in half price."

Trigs appeared to give this view his consideration.

"But then," he said, as if he found it unsatisfactory, "you won't deserve it, you know; my papa says that's mean."

Private Rich made no comment on the commanding officer's view; he hissed a trifle louder, and made quite an unnecessary noise with the burnisher and curb-chain.

"My papa says he would not like to feel as if the other people in heaven were nudging each other and saying, 'He's no gentleman; he got in at the side-door when no one was looking.' Should you like to be thought mean and ungentlemanly?"

Private Rich grinned largely.

"Well, I don't set up to be what you'd exactly call a gentleman," he replied, cheerfully.

Trigs looked annoyed.

"You needn't be mean, anyway!" he said, rather scornfully.

"It don't do for a private soldier to be too particklar," answered Mr. Rich. "Tommy's got to take all he can get and be thankful; he don't get a good deal without payin' for it, by what I can see."

He then rather skilfully led the discussion on grocery-money, for instance, and barrack dilapidations.

Trigs felt that he was being eluded, and resented it. He got off the cornbin and marched to the door.

"Anyway," he observed juridically, "my papa says it's mean, and horrid, and disgusting for us to try and treat our Lord as we wouldn't treat a fellow man; he says, if we do like you say, we're acting as if the sergeant-major's wife were to come up and get the free soup and coals meant for the poor women off the strength."

"The sergeant-major's wife's a deal too fine a finch for that!" remarked Private Rich, again evading the argument.

Trigs stalked off. He was not greatly pleased with Mr. Rich on this occasion.

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V

Nevertheless, Private Rich adored Trigs and was immensely influenced by his opinion.

At first he constantly gave vent to sentiments that roused the scorn of his youthful patron. For Mr. Thomas Atkins, represent him as you will in nice little books, has not a naturally delicate sense of honour. He is not very much inclined to believe in it in yourself; and for his own part sets more store by a keen faculty for avoidance of being "bested" by any one. But Private Rich did not enjoy the scorn with which such principles were greeted by Trigs, however he might grin at the moment. And he never put forward the condemned view again. What was more, he began to have a hazy idea of why the young master turned up his nose at such things, and to be conscious of an unsuspected standard somewhere, transcending the company code, and eclipsing even the lofty teaching of the "Soldier's Pocket Book."

But Private Rich did not quote Trigs as Trigs quoted his father and Private Rich himself. He did not disseminate his recently-acquired lights, or seek to be a barrack-room reformer.

Trigs had a pony called Gib, not because it had that blemish, but because it had been bought when the regiment was stationed at the Rock. On this pony he rode almost every day, generally with his father, sometimes with Private Rich. Trigs rode beautifully, had any amount of nerve and a splendid seat, and Private Rich was hugely proud of the child's riding.

"The second in command had better get some lessons from him," he observed dispassionately to that officer's groom one day. The second in command had a habit of suddenly displaying his love of horses by tenderly embracing his charger on the Brickfields.

"I told my papa that you don't say your prayers," remarked Trigs calmly. They were out riding and were walking their horses, having given them a gallop on Roborough Down. "He said, 'Some people never do talk much, Trigs.'"

Private Rich had recourse to one of his bland grins, and said, "Whoa, then!"

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"But I said you talked a good lot to me," pursued Trigs historically. "And then he said (my papa said) that was a different language."

Private Rich's grin expanded broadly.

"I'm not sure that I quite understand what he meant." This was quite one of Trigs's bursts of candour. He disliked particularly not understanding anything, and resented intensely any assumption of his incapacity to understand the sayings of his elders.

"Of course," said the child, anxious to correct any suggestion of his failure to understand on this particular occasion, "Roman Catholics say their prayers . . . like Corporal Rourke."

"Do he? I never hear'd him, sir."

"But you're not a Roman Catholic, are you, Private Rich?"

"Not that I know of," said the soldier, guardedly.

"Then," pursued Trigs, "my papa said, 'Perhaps some day you will be able to teach him to speak, Trigs.' Why don't you say your prayers?"

Private Rich seemed considering the question.

"What time do you say them, sir?" he inquired, with some appearance of interest.

"Well, it's about eight o'clock in the morning and about half-past eight o'clock at night, I should think."

"Ah, well," observed Private Rich, in a tone of regret, "that's just when I'm feeding Gib, and the colonel's roan, you see. That's where it is."

The hollowness of this difficulty was, of course, pounced upon by the youthful theologian.

"I didn't mean you were to say yours then; when you get up in the morning and when you go to bed—that's the proper time, you know."

"In the barrack-room?"

Trigs assented.

"Why, there'd be too much rumpus, Master Trigs. They'd never make out what I was saying."

It was odd how shy Private Rich was of explicit mention of the Divine name in this serious connection. He had not invariably shown the same reticence on less suitable occasions. If he had not jagged his head with an upward backward movement it may be doubted if

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Trigs would have understood the object of his allusion. But, so aided, he did understand.

"Why, He can hear, no matter what a noise there is," he explained (of course, really, unnecessarily).

"Well, it must be moithering," said Private Rich, "picking out the prayers from the—other things. I doubt They'd rather be excused from listening to the barrack-room at all."

This view somewhat depressed Trigs, who decided to consult his father in reference to it.

For the present he changed the subject. "Have you heard about the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste?" he inquired.

"Is it in the papers?" asked Private Rich, who was not a hagiologist.

"Oh no; it's in history; at least it's not in English history, but my papa told me last night. It's about a regiment that was called the Thundering something (not regiment, I don't think, but it means regiment). Why should you think it was called the Thundering Regiment?"

"P'raps it was a thundering good 'un," suggested Private Rich.

"Oh, but that wasn't the reason," observed Trigs, who, however, seemed to think the suggestion not unpleasing. "I'll tell you the real reason. They were sent to fight against the Germans, who were barbarians then, you know" (Private Rich seemed to think that very conceivable); "not Christians or anything. Oh, but I forgot. The Romans weren't Christians either, only this one regiment. And the Germans got the Roman army into a sort of trap. They had to fight or else wait until the next day, and they had no water at all—hadn't had all the day."

"P'raps they'd something better," suggested the sanguine Private Rich.

Trigs hurried on without noticing this interruption.

"They had nothing to drink, and they'd marched miles and miles, and were dead-tired, and thirsty and hungry. The Germans were on a hill with the hot, hot sun behind them, and they hadn't marched at all. They were rested, and had just had their dinner and plenty to

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drink with it. So there was a council of war, and while they were at it a young officer came and asked to be allowed to say something. He came from the one Christian regiment, and he came to ask a favour. He said his regiment would like to be put right in front where the German arrows would fall thickest."

"Did they fight with arrows?" inquired Private Rich, with ill-veiled scorn. "Germans, didn't you say they was, sir?"

"Everybody fought with arrows then," pursued the learned Trigs. "Well, and, of course, the enemy, charging down the hill with their heavy cavalry, would break first on the regiment posted in front, and that was where this Christian regiment wanted to be put. "We'll call upon Christ, our God, and He will give us the victory," he said. Well, the general and the others talked it over, and they said things were so bad they couldn't be worse, and so they would do what the young officer asked, and all the army got ready to fight. But they were half dead with thirst and tiredness, and the hot, hot sun was in their eyes, so that they could hardly see anything in front of them. The Christian regiment was right in front, as they had asked to be, and before the fight began the whole army kept quite quiet and listened while they prayed. They stood with their sword-arms stretched out, and asked Christ to listen to them, and said how two armies were watching what He would do, so they begged Him not to let Himself be put to shame before them all. Then they stopped, and up the hill they charged, with the hot, hot blazing sun beating down in their eyes, and making their helmets burn like cooking-pots, and with an army behind them, and an army in front of them. It seemed quite hopeless; there were thousands of the enemy; and only hundreds of their friends, and everything was in favour of the barbarians. Then all of a sudden the blazing sun burnt out, the sky grew black, the thunder crashed, and there came forks of lightning dazzling the enemy and glittering on the Roman shields and spears; and the rain came down, sheets and sheets of cool rain, the Romans caught it in their helmets and drank it; but the Germans were frightened at what had happened, and cried out that their gods had deserted them, and gone

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over to the enemy. Then they turned and fled, and the Romans conquered; so that legion (oh, that's the name for regiment!), so that legion was called the Thundering Legion. That's the reason, you see."

Private Rich had not been without interest. Then Trigs told him with great circumstance of the Forty Martyrs, and, when he had done, said—

"There! what do you think of that? Isn't it lovely? but oh, Private Rich, wasn't it dreadful, too?"

"Well," said Private Rich, philosophically, "it was a long while ago, let's hope it ain't true!"

VI

The regiment was ordered to India. Of course, every one had known the time was drawing near, and, while some of us were sorry, I think nearly as many were glad. The old soldiers gave great accounts of it. "One parade a day and a black chap to do all your work for you, that's about it," said Private Frowde, who had soldiered before, to his chum Private Skrimshank, whose mouth watered at the description.

Well, in this story I don't want to say much about a troopship-voyage, because I shall have to do that in another one. So I'll skip all about our dismal journey to Portsmouth in the *Persistance;* our transhipment into the *Alligator;* how we nearly ran ashore on Tarifa Point; how we couldn't put in at Malta on account of the cholera (so that'll tell you what year it was), and how we met with horrible weather and our steam-steering gear broke down between Malta and Alexandria. There is no need to describe our coaling at Port Said; the Egyptian conjuror who came on board and brought live rabbits out of the adjutant's nose and fresh eggs out of the first lieutenant's telescope; or the mirage and the flock of flamingoes and pelicans we saw in the canal—for all these things are indispensable in the telling of another story.

You must hurry along (quicker than the troopship did), leaving the great swamp of Lake Menzaleh on your right; past Kantara, and its great siding, and its crowd

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of waiting camels; past El Ferdane and El Gisr, with its gimcrack-looking mosque; you must but glance at Lake Timsah (where you will see no crocodiles) and the summer palace of the Khedive Ismail at Ismailia, where the Empress Eugénie and the Crown Prince Frederick were his guests for the opening of the canal, and where later our wounded soldiers were in hospital. Neither at Tussum nor in the Great Bitter Lake can you pause, for as this humble tale of mine draws to its end I have no heart to think or speak of other things. But suppose yourself near Shaluf and within an hour or so of Suez; and on the poop, looking south-east over the ship's side towards the Well of Moses, stand the colonel and the adjutant, who have been chattering.

"I shall miss Private Rich," said the colonel, "when we settle down in India. Native Saises will hardly make up for him. But I am sure he would not otherwise have taken the trip again; so it's really a good thing."

"I should think you do not regret what you've done for him," observed the adjutant.

"I have done nothing; but Trigs has helped him—for good and all," replied the commanding officer quietly. "That was all my share, foreseeing how he would do it."

"Here he comes."

Not Private Rich, but Trigs; and he climbed up and took his favourite place on the stanchion, with his small flat back leant against the davits of a lifeboat.

"When shall we be at Suez?"

"We shall anchor in an hour. But, Trigs, you can't go ashore till to-morrow; so you mustn't get too impatient. That gear has to be looked to again, and we don't start again till to-morrow night—or Thursday morning, perhaps. You'll be able to be on shore a lot to-morrow, and ride on a donkey out to the Marine Lines and by the Sweet Water Canal."

"I wish I could take Gib ashore and ride him!"

"Very likely! And Lance-Corporal Rich on Gray Friar, eh?"

"Of course."

Nearer and nearer to Suez, lying on its dead flat beneath the long ridge of Geb-el-Tanaba; round the final

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curve and out into the anchorage; away south-east the arid ranges, among which Sinai rears his head, uncovered, in perpetual memory of the Divine presence, and the deep, deep blue waters of the Red Sea.

Then the day died, and the tropic night put on her black and silver mourning; and from the distant Gate of Tears came the whisper of a cool sigh.

Later yet, and the throbbing silence of the southern night was roused by the merry noise of song and chorus, and yellow-red gleamed the light of port and scuttle; still later and a deeper silence fell on all, and, wrapt in quietness, lay on the lapping water the great white barrack-ship. So the night passed, and from many lands, in all the great weary world, thousands of souls of men crept back to God, while their brethren slept, and found their longer rest.

And the day came in all its gaudier beauty; the last of earthly life for many and many a one, whose trivial tale of life should die unfinished on their lips.

All were astir early, and, being anchored, some took to fishing—with, indeed, little result, as must be confessed. Presently there was a whisper of excitement. Was it? Yes, it was a shark! A huge, black, loathsome water fiend, slowly prowling round.

Most had never seen a shark before, but even they recognised the hated demon of the sea. Some ran for shark-hooks, some for pork, one officer went for a rifle, and obtained leave to shoot it if he could. And then—how it happened, who could tell, but there was a fall, a splash, and a moaning cry of horror.

"It's the child! It's Trigs!"

What would avail life-buoys—ay, or boats either—with that black awful foe so near? So near! For a moment or so he seemed to have disappeared, then the child rose to the surface, and, but a dozen yards from him, through the clear water, rose that frightful shape.

Another splash! Who was it?

"Rich! It's Lance-Corporal Rich! It's Rich! Oh, God, help him!"

But sick, sick at heart were those who watched. The heavier plunge and louder splash did really startle away the monstrous brute for what seemed a thousand years

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to those who watched, but was really, oh, so short, few short moments.

The man had seized the child, and, with a fierce effort, lifted and flung him on to the grating of the gangway, where he lay stunned and dripping—and in safety. And then close beneath the man rose, slow and sure and deathly, the hideous blackness of the shark. A horrible cry and sharp report, and yet another, broke together on the listening, awful silence, and the water flushed with blood, and the fish plunged and swerved, and rose and plunged, and swung round upon his side and sank.

In only a few seconds they had the man on board, but, few as they were, too late.

It was quite, quite hopeless, useless to touch or attempt to move him, for, long ere they could have carried him forward to the hospital, he would have gone upon a longer journey, and reached the far-off, unseen goal.

"Is the child there? I want to say good-bye."

"Oh, no, no, no!" wept the kneeling child. "Oh, Rich, I can't bear it. God won't take you from me; oh, indeed, He won't."

"He's been very good to me," said the dying man, "like the colonel and you've been, Master Trigs. He's given me a chance, and that's all I asked for. If I've done a lot of bad I've done one good thing now, and He'll look at that and not see all the other. I reckon He won't want to see both at once. He'll be so kind to forget about the other."

And so out into the great deep that simple soldier-soul went fearlessly.

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BY EASY INSTALMENTS

I

THE MUSICAL ALBUM

"MADAM," said the Tempter, "the payment will be arranged to suit your convenience."

The Tempter was a most respectable-looking person, middle-aged, well but quietly dressed, and with a delightful air of prosperity about him. Nothing makes one appear so good-humoured as this well-to-do manner, and Mrs. Bragg thought the Tempter quite a delightful gentleman. Mrs. Bragg was herself a comely, stylish young woman, immensely conscious of the new clothes and new furniture she was mistress of as a newly-married woman.

There were those who said that Colour-Sergeant Bragg might have done better for himself than marry Polly Gay. The Colonel's wife in particular was sorry when the match had been announced, for Colour-Sergeant Bragg was a smart, rising young fellow, and one of the best and most promising non-commissioned officers in her husband's regiment. And Mrs. Wise had no great opinion of the Gay family. Quartermaster-Sergeant Gay himself was a steady, reliable old fellow, but his wife was a foolish, vain woman, who had brought up her girls full of conceited notions, and seemed to have taught them to care for little but dress and extravagance. But, of course, a colour-sergeant does not have to ask his commanding officer to approve his choice of a wife, still less to consult the commanding officer's wife on the subject, and Colour-Sergeant Bragg had been captivated by Polly's pretty face, and "fashionable" manners. To tell the truth it is likely enough that he was misled by the expensive, or apparently expensive, clothes the girl had so

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many of, and partly believed them to be an evidence that the old quartermaster-sergeant was much better off than was the case.

A quartermaster-sergeant is supposed to have considerable opportunities of saving, and the Gay family had a superficial air of wealth that deceived the young N.C.O. There were no sons, and perhaps Colour-Sergeant Bragg flattered himself that a slice of old Gay's savings would sooner or later fall to Polly. The truth was that there were no savings whatever.

"Madam," added the Tempter, "do not let the question of payment come in at all. If you fancy the thing, take it; and we shall not fall out about the terms."

What could be fairer? Mrs. Bragg certainly "fancied" the thing. He had used the right expression —it was just a fancy. The "thing" was a showy, much-gilded photograph-album, with a musical box enclosed in the cover, so that when one opened the book it immediately rendered "The Bogie Man," and went on to play "Ta-ra-ra-boom-deay."

The album was a large square one (the aristocratic shape and size, declared the Tempter), and contained "cabinet places," and each page was decorated with a highly-decorated badge of one or other of the regiments of the British Army. As it happened, "The Bogie Man" was a very favourite tune with Mrs. Bragg, and she knew her husband liked "Ta-ra-ra-boom-deay."

It also happened that, between them, the young couple possessed a very large number of photographs; nowhere, perhaps, does one accumulate so large a collection as in the army.

Finally, it must be said that Mrs. Bragg found it delightful to hear herself addressed as "Madam"; it was quite the new style, much more aristocratic than "Miss" or "Ma'am."

"But two pounds ten is a lot of money," she pleaded; but not as one who disliked being persuaded out of her opinion.

"That's not the way to look at it, Madam," urged the Tempter, with a languishing glance at the pretty bride, "call it five shillings a month for ten months. After all, what is five shillings in the month to a lady like you?

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You'd spend that on a cab, and your husband not grudge it you."

This was quite a brilliant suggestion to Mrs. Bragg. Why should she not call it "cabs"? No doubt her husband would grumble if she often took a cab, but Citadel Hill is steep, and on occasions of marketing in the town a cab would not be unreasonable. Why should she not deny herself what her husband would allow her, and buy instead something that she would have "to show for it"?

The Tempter was a very crafty man. He had not hinted a word about deceiving her husband. He was far too wise for that. But he knew well that it was the fear of acknowledging such an extravagance to her husband that was making the girl hesitate. And he knew well that his hint would be understood.

"And are you sure five shillings a month for ten months will do as well?"

"Every bit as well, Madam."

Then the Tempter began folding up the album in tissue paper, after which he handed it to the girl, as though the bargain had been formally ratified.

"There'll be no portrait in it," he said, bowing gallantly, "that will be half so charming as your own."

Five minutes later the Tempter was gone, and Mrs. Bragg was sitting by her table filling the album with photographs. She was rather disappointed to find how very many "cabinet places" there were in the book, while by far the greater number of her portraits were carte-de-visite size. She thought of what the man had said, and wondered whether she should not get her own photograph taken, cabinet-size; it was a pity to have so many of the cabinet places vacant.

It may as well be explained here that Colour-Sergeant Bragg was away. The whole regiment had been ordered off at twelve hours' notice to South Wales on special duty in connection with the miners' strike, and it was reported that their absence might continue for many weeks. Mrs. Bragg was, therefore, lonely; that is to say, she had not much to do, and felt herself rather dull. When she had had her tea, she put on her things and went down the town for an hour's "change." She did not admit to

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herself that she meant to go and inquire at a photographer's as to the prices of cabinet portraits, but such was really her intention. She assured herself that she was only going to walk as far as her married sister's, her sister Carry's, who was married to a first-class petty officer on board of H.M.S. *Myosotis*.

To reach her sister's house she had to pass through Union Street, and, as she well remembered, half-way down Union Street was the Army and Navy Art Gallery and Studio, where several of her acquaintances had had their portraits taken.

Of course she paused, in passing, to look in. She noticed in the window a very imposing carbon picture of a girl she knew well. It was large, much larger than a cabinet portrait, and was tinted very flatteringly.

Poor Polly told herself that, thus represented, she would herself make a much nicer picture. The photographer was standing in the doorway, and had no great difficulty in guessing what was passing in her mind.

"Won't you step in and let me show you some specimens of our various styles?" he suggested. "That is very well, but some of our subjects do us greater credit."

Mrs. Bragg smiled.

"I wonder if you could make anything of me?" she inquired, casting down her eyes.

"Ah," cried the artist, "there would not be much credit in making a lovely picture of you. No credit certainly, but pleasure enough. What a picture I could make of you in this position!"

He turned and took up from a large table a portrait of one of the Royal princesses; it was really a pirated copy, enlarged, of a portrait by a London photographer. But he contrived to let Mrs. Bragg believe that her Royal Highness had sat to him.

There would be "something special," the girl told herself, in being taken by the same artist.

"Oh, but I ain't a princess," she said with a laugh.

The artist bowed very politely.

"I'm sure," he declared, "you're very fit for the place. Only most of them are not half so good-looking;" he pretended to say the latter words under his breath. But Polly heard and was not at all offended.

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"That don't give me a princess's money," she retorted, "and those sort of portraits are sure to be very dear."

"I must admit," said the man, "we do not go in for the 'cheap and nasty.' I turn out only high-class work; but," he added carelessly, "in the case of the more costly pictures many of our patrons (he was far too refined to say customers) settle for the payment by easy instalments. After all, what lady feels any difficulty in sparing half-a-crown a week, for three months, out of her pin-money?"

"I was thinking," remarked Polly, "of being taken cabinet-size."

"Well, if you decided on being taken in the large style, like her Royal Highness, I would throw in half-a-dozen cabinets as a compliment."

"Half-a-dozen cabinets without any extra cost!" exclaimed Mrs. Bragg. "Why, I wonder how you can manage to do it."

"Well," replied the man, "we try to oblige our customers in every possible way, and our terms are within the reach of every one. And now, what have you to say to my offer?"

Mrs. Bragg thought the offer munificent. She did not know that in any case a cabinet-sized plate would have to be taken to enlarge from, and the printing-off of half-a-dozen would not cost the man a shilling. It seemed to her that to let slip such a chance would be quite extravagant.

An appointment was made for the following morning, and the girl continued her walk to her sister's.

II

ONE POUND DEPOSIT

CARRY MARTINGALE was in many ways very like her sister. There was only a year's difference in age between them, and they were in size and build exactly alike. One was dark and the other fair, but their features were cast in precisely the same mould, so that people said they might easily pass for twins.

"All the same there is a year between us," Polly would declare with a little toss of her empty head, whence

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it may be inferred without telling that she was the younger.

They were both vain, idle-minded girls, meaning no harm, but likely enough to cause harm sooner or later. Carry had been married a few months before her sister, and her husband had already begun to suspect that in his admiration for a pretty face he had fallen into a mistake. He was a first-class petty officer on a man-of-war, and very well-to-do.

He was at present in the Mediterranean, but he had left his wife in a tidy little house, furnished plainly and rather meagrely, but with things that were all paid for, and were solid and good of their kind. These things had rather disappointed Carry; for they were of the useful order, not the ornamental, and they had been chiefly bought second-hand by her mother-in-law at auctions. The truth was, that they were four or five times as good as new articles would have been if bought for the same money.

When Polly arrived she was led into the parlour. Carry always made a point of this, for in the Citadel the married quarters were very bad, and her sister had only one large room, though her husband was a colour-sergeant, divided by a screen into sleeping and living room. It was a distinction to have a separate parlour.

Nevertheless, this room was a grievance of Carry's. It was a great thing to have it, but it should have been different. It had very little furniture. Three chairs and a table, fender and fire-irons, with a few shelves in the recesses on each side of the fireplace, and a cupboard under each set of shelves. That was all; for her husband had said they must furnish "up to" the parlour, reserving for it only what they could spare after the more necessary rooms, kitchen and bedrooms, had been furnished. And so the parlour had come rather short.

"We can fill it up later on," her husband had said, and Miss Carry Gay had not thought it prudent to offer much objection then.

"I was just going out," said Mrs. Martingale to her sister. "I promised to go and drink a cup of tea with Selina M'Bean. Why not come on with me?"

Polly had no objection, and so they set off together.

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Mrs. M'Bean was the daughter of a quartermaster, and had married a market-gardener with an excellent business. Her house and belongings were a source of considerable heartburnings to the two sisters. But Mrs. M'Bean was a very different sort of young woman, thrifty and saving, just such a wife as the canny Scotch gardener wanted.

She welcomed her two acquaintances cordially enough; they were not exactly in her line, but she had grown up with them, and did not choose to lay herself open to the charge of wanting to hold aloof from old acquaintance now her father had risen to a commission and she had married a substantial man.

Her parlour was the envy of Carry Martingale. It had a bow-window, and opened by a glass door into a small conservatory; the furniture was plentiful and good, and the carpet was delightfully soft and warm to the feet. All this was pleasant enough to the young housewife, but she thought a good deal more of her husband and her baby than she did of her sofa and armchairs, and Carry Martingale told herself that the latter were thrown away on Selina.

"She's that sort of girl," she would declare, "that good things are all the same as bad to her. I daresay it provokes M'Bean to see how little she cares about the things he has bought for her."

In this, however, Mrs. Martingale was quite wrong. M'Bean was by no means hurt to see that his wife thought more of himself than of what he had given her.

Mrs. Bragg and Mrs. Martingale noticed what a nice tea-set was used, and observed also that there was another still smarter, in a glass cupboard in one corner.

"I see," remarked Carry, after they had finished admiring the baby, which did not take long, for neither of the sisters cared much for children. "I see that your husband has not treated you to a piano yet."

"No," replied Mrs. M'Bean; "he said we could wait awhile for that. There are so many things to get in setting-up housekeeping, as you know yourself. And now there's the baby, I should never have time to practise if he did get one."

"Well, I think I should miss that more than anything," said Carry.

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Mrs. M'Bean laughed good-humouredly.

"Wait till you've a baby of your own," she said; "you'll tell a different story then."

Carry and Polly both "pulled a face." They agreed that it would be a great nuisance when the little torments did begin to arrive.

All the time they were there, the two sisters were silently comparing their own homes with Mrs. M'Bean's. They both felt sure that if they had such good things they would make more of them; they assured themselves that Selina had very little taste, and they thought her way of arranging her sitting-room very old-fashioned. Except a few vases of beautiful flowers, there was not much in the way of mere ornament, whereas even Polly's quarters were crowded with Japanese fans and scrolls, coloured ware figures, photograph-frames, and a host of other receptacles for barrack-dust.

By the time the girls said good-bye, they were half envious, half disdainful.

"I can't think," said Carry as they walked home, "how Selina can bear to have no piano in a room like that. I should feel as if every one who came in was looking for it."

As they passed along Union Street, Polly's attention was attracted by a piano in the window of a brightly-lit shop, with a Hebraic name over the door.

"Why, Carry, do look," she said, "what a handsome piano. Only eight guineas, and all the front inlaid."

They both stood still and feasted their eyes upon it.

"I suppose it's second-hand," remarked Carry.

"I dare say. But it looks just as good as new. Who would ever think it was second-hand?"

Poor Carry was telling herself exactly the same thing. And she was thinking how different her empty parlour would look with that handsome instrument in it. With a piano like that she would make her room look more "*distangy*" than Selina M'Bean's. And only eight guineas!

"I expect," she said, a sudden chill clouding her rosy dreams, "it's eight guineas a quarter—on hire, you know."

The shopman had noticed them looking in, and had

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come close to the open door. He now overheard their comments.

"No, madam," he said, coming forward, "it is only eight guineas, purchase-price. You may well find it hard to believe. It is a miracle. The truth is, that instrument was seized as part of a bad debt. Not by me, of course, but by a gentleman, and he let me have it, together with some other things, for next to nothing. I am only making ten shillings on it. It is nearly new. Won't you come in and try it?"

Now the truth was that neither of the girls knew any more of pianos than they knew of buffaloes, but they liked to be made much of, and they were quite idle. This sort of thing passed the time away very pleasantly.

They went in, and Polly played a few bars of a popular air on the instrument, and Carry tried some chords on it.

"What a tone!" cried the man. "And how it suits your touch. Some other ladies were trying the piano just now—they are going to write by to-night's post to say whether they will have the instrument or not; they are not quite sure if it is not too large for the space they want it to fit in, in their drawing-room. Well, they could not bring out the tone like you two ladies do. I expect you're from the Academy of Music, are you not?"

The two girls admitted they were not. But they were much flattered at the supposition.

"Eight guineas," said Carry thoughtfully.

As she spoke, her eyes were resting on a couch and two easy-chairs. The three matched, and were very showy. Imitation walnut, covered in stamped red plush.

These were marked seven guineas.

"If you liked to take the noble suite," said the man, "I would add four chairs to match—I have them in the warehouse—and only charge you ten guineas; for piano and all eighteen guineas. Nay, I should not like to drive a bargain with a lady. You should have the lot for eighteen pounds."

"Eighteen pounds is not in everybody's purse," observed Carry.

"Of course not, madam. We do not carry eighteen pounds in our pockets; ladies do not, seeing how convenient for the pickpockets the fashionable arrangement

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of ladies' pockets is. But ladies have cheque-books, you know," said Mr. Emanuel insinuatingly.

Now Carry knew very well that she had no cheque-book, and so did the man. But it made her feel very important to hear it hinted that she had. It had always seemed to her the height of prosperous dignity to keep a banking account.

She pursed her lips importantly, and shook her head a little, as if she did not precisely remember what her credit-balance was.

"Nowadays," remarked Mr. Emanuel, "so many of the upper classes find it convenient to purchase on the gradual-payment system. Those goods would only cost you a pound a month, after the first deposit of one pound; and in eighteen months they would be entirely paid for, and you would never have felt it."

Polly now began to abet the Tempter. Next to buying things herself she enjoyed helping other people to buy; and she had enough family pride to like the idea of her sister having a piano when Selina M'Bean had not.

Before very long Carry succumbed, and she had given her address, and paid the deposit of a sovereign. With that sovereign she had meant to pay a bill to a poor girl who had made a dress for her. Her mother-in-law had recommended the girl, and she had made the dress beautifully, not, of course, finding the material. That was a piece of silk her husband had sent home to her from the Mediterranean.

"Miss Gussitt can wait a week or two," she told herself. Poor Miss Gussitt; she had been promised ready-money, and had herself promised to let the grocer, who supplied her and her mother, have the money by the end of that week. Carry never gave a thought to the troubles or embarrassments of the unfortunate dressmaker.

III

CORPORAL BRIGHT

At the end of the week the grocer did not get his money, and he became importunate. The account was such a small one it was not worth while being patient and polite.

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Had it been ten times as much he would have been willing it should run on.

He wrote such a rough letter to Miss Gussitt that the poor woman was dreadfully upset, and got one of her terrible neuralgic headaches. It was almost impossible for the girl to work at her dressmaking when she had one of these attacks, and quite impossible to work at her best. She was finishing a dress for a lady that Saturday, and when she took it home the lady found great fault with it. She assured Miss Gussitt that she was so much disappointed that she would not let her have the making of the mantle, as she had intended.

Nor did she say a word as to payment, and Miss Gussitt, hoping that she might alter her mind as to the mantle, did not like to mention it.

Nor did she like to go to the grocer's to get in the usual Saturday supplies after his angry letter. He noticed she did not come, and told himself she had gone elsewhere.

"That's always the way," he said to himself; "they take your goods on credit, and then go elsewhere with their ready money."

The truth was Miss Gussitt had simply gone without.

It is probable that Mrs. Martingale did not accurately know the importance to poor Miss Gussitt of keeping her promise; but she had at least some idea of the truth, and her conscience required some gentle sedative. She therefore told herself that she would get a coat like her dress, and let Miss Gussitt have the money for both jobs together. She wrote her a note to that effect.

"I have not sent you the £1 for making my dress," she wrote, "because I have been so pleased with it that I have made up my mind to get you to make me a coat to correspond. And so I may as well pay for both together. I will drop you a line when I have obtained the silk, which I do not find very easy to match, and you can then come and take the measurements, and I will tell you as to style."

Poor Miss Gussitt was glad to have the job, but she plainly understood that the payment was now deferred at least a fortnight.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Martingale was by no means in a hurry to match the silk. She had, of course, decided to

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have the coat, chiefly to gain time, as an excuse because she could not settle for the dress at the time agreed upon. And the silk was really not easy to match. It was a rich quality, of a delicate and uncommon shade. When at last she found something near it, it was very expensive. To pay for it, as there was now the instalment-money for the piano and furniture to raise every month, she had to let the milk-bill stand over.

At last the coat was really put in hand, and Miss Gussitt lost no time over it. It had to be trimmed, so Carry decided at the last moment, and Miss Gussitt was asked to get the trimming, and "put it down with the rest in the account." She therefore had no alternative but to send in the bill with the coat, the bill for the dress and coat and trimming, with a meek, but urgent request that payment might be as prompt as convenient. The milkman had, however, been before her with an explanation that he did not pretend to do business on the credit system, so that he must ask for a remittance in full that day. His bill was nearly two pounds, for Carry had let it run on, and it included milk, eggs, and butter.

He added weight to his demand by an intimation that if the amount was not forthcoming he should cease to supply Mrs. Martingale, and send the account to her mother-in-law, for transmission to her husband.

In extreme perturbation, Carry had sent the whole amount, which left her a few shillings short of her instalment-money for the piano and furniture.

Polly Bragg did not forget her appointment with the photographer on the day following that on which she and her sister had visited Mrs. M'Bean. By eleven o'clock she was dressed, and by a quarter to twelve was waiting her turn in the studio.

The portrait was duly taken, and the artist expressed an opinion that it would prove one of the most satisfactory pictures he had ever turned out.

Just as she was being led through the waiting-room on her way out, she caught sight of an acquaintance coming towards her. This was Corporal Bright, who was supposed to be the best-looking man in the regiment. He was of a somewhat higher social standing than the

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ordinary soldier, and was thought by many to be a gentleman. Nor did he dislike being supposed to be one; he was, as a matter of fact, the son of a small hotel-keeper and had originally been articled to a solicitor, but had proved utterly unfit for the plodding indoor life. Finally, he had run away and enlisted. There was no great harm about the young man, but he was somewhat spoiled and accustomed to think himself irresistible. He was good-natured, and very open-handed with money whenever he had any to throw about.

That morning he had received a letter from his mother, who thought she was doing him a kindness by sending him a Post-Office-order for a couple of pounds. She begged him to lay in a stock of warm vests against the winter, as the season threatened to be very severe; and probably he would let her think that he had done so.

"She'll only fuss herself about me if I don't," he assured himself with perfect truth. But, first of all, he betook himself to the Union Art Galleries to pay for some photographs he had had taken.

They had really been finished nearly a month, but the money that he should have paid for them he had spent, giving some of it to a married chum whose children had been ill, so he had not been able to come and claim the photographs till now.

He and Mrs. Bragg said "Good morning," and began a little chat, while the artist went for Corporal Bright's photographs and change.

"I have been having mine done," she informed him; "panel size, I think they call it."

"Oh, I hoped you had been having some smaller ones done," he replied. "I was going to ask if you could spare me one."

"I have had some cabinets as well," said the girl.

Then he repeated his request and she gave a sort of promise.

When the artist returned with Corporal Bright's portraits, change, and receipt, he turned to a book, and explained to Mrs. Bragg that it was usual to make a deposit of ten shillings at the time of sitting when the goods were taken on the easy payment system.

Poor Polly! She blushed crimson. She had not

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hinted to Corporal Bright anything about easy payments; why need the man have blurted it out? It seemed to her that the photographer was not half so respectful and polite since the arrival of her military acquaintance. And there was another thing to make her blush; for she knew she had nothing like ten shillings in her pocket.

Corporal Bright saw her embarrassment, and guessed pretty accurately the cause. He was really good-natured, and did not stop to think if it was the best thing, in the long run, for the young woman to help her out of her momentary awkwardness. He knew that his own presence made it much worse for her than if she had been told of the matter before his arrival. So he felt half responsible for her annoyance.

"I do not suppose," he said carelessly to Mrs. Bragg, "that you thought of any regulation of the kind. Perhaps you have not even got your purse with you. I know my sisters never have theirs, and they would often be in a corner if I were not with them. Will you let me arrange this? You can pay me back when you get home."

He really spoke kindly, and meant kindly; to poor, silly Polly his words sounded like the voice of an angel. She thanked him, and admitted that she had left her purse behind, which was more than she need have admitted, for her purse was even then in her pocket, only it contained no more than four shillings and some coppers.

The deposit was paid, and together Mrs. Bragg and Corporal Bright left the studio. Together they walked home, the young man talking as much as possible to relieve the evident embarrassment of his companion. At the quarter-guard they parted, but Mrs. Bragg had in her pocket one of the cabinet portraits of her handsome acquaintance, which she told herself would look ever so well in the musical album.

A couple of days after this, Polly had a letter from her husband enclosing some postal orders, and she very rightly resolved to repay Corporal Bright his half-sovereign without delay.

As rightly, that is to say, as it was open to her to act, in the false position into which she had got herself.

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It was not, of course, really right that money earned by her husband, and sent by him towards necessary household expenses, should have to be given in repayment of a debt contracted for a mere useless extravagance, like a panel-portrait.

IV

SERGEANT TONG'S TALE

But though Mrs. Bragg was resolved that it behoved her to get out of Corporal Bright's debt as soon as might be, she was by no means clear as to the best way of repaying the money. If she sent it to him by post, her writing would be on the letter, and would very probably be read by several soldiers in the company before the letter should have been put into his hands.

As it happened she met him that morning, and he stopped a minute to "pass the time of day." If he had been really a gentleman, as he liked to be thought, it is certain that he would have been shy of anything that must remind the young woman of her debt to him.

To do him justice, he was not thinking of the money, but he liked a chat with a pretty girl, married or single, and did not stop to think if being seen chatting with him would do her harm or good.

It has been said that he was good-natured, but his good nature was of the thoughtless, rather selfish, sort, prompting to perform generous acts when generosity did not cost him much self-denial, but by no means causing him to deny himself what amused him for the sake of some other person whom it might annoy.

Had any one told him that any appearance of intimacy with himself would do the young wife serious harm he would not have believed it, and would have been a good deal offended. For, as he told himself, he meant no harm whatever.

But that Colour-Sergeant Bragg might be a bit jealous of his pretty wife he could believe, only he did not greatly mind whether Bragg was jealous or not. When a rather plain man like that carries off a pretty wife he must expect drawbacks.

"Oh, Mr. Bright, I want to give you back your ten

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shillings. But I have not had an opportunity before. If you would call for a moment this afternoon, I would be so glad," she said.

When a young N.C.O. is called "Mr.", he knows a compliment is intended.

Of course he promised to do so, for he guessed that, even if she had had the half-sovereign in her pocket, she would not like to be seen handing him money in the middle of the barrack-square. He knew she meant early in the afternoon, but as it happened he could not get off early; and he told himself that it was just as well to go when he would be less observed by the regimental gossips.

When he knocked at the door, Mrs. Bragg came and opened it; she had the money in her hand, and had meant to give it him there. But she saw he expected to be asked in for a minute or two, and she did not see how she could shut the door in the face of a man who had been so kind to her in her difficulty.

So rather guiltily, which made it all the worse, she did ask him in.

He caught sight of the album, which was on the table, and asked to be allowed to look at it. He did not fail to observe the post of honour which had been given to his own portrait, and remarked that there was an empty space on the page opposite.

"I will put one of my own there, when they come," she replied, rather foolishly.

Just then a knock came at the door, and a sergeant's wife put her head in.

"Oh, Mrs. Bragg, I beg your pardon. I thought you were alone. I was going to ask if you could oblige me with a stamp. This letter is rather particular, and I want to drop it into the pillar to catch this post. But I would not have interrupted had I known you'd company."

Now Mrs. Tong was one of the regimental gossips, and not a good-natured gossip either.

There will always be in every society, a certain number of people to whom it is a horrible pleasure to think evil, and they are seldom content to let their evil ideas rot away in silence within their own minds. What they think, out of the wicked treasure of their hearts, they cruelly speak. Perhaps at the Day of Judgment they

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will be surprised at the extent and gravity of the ruin their malice has occasioned.

It was obvious to Mrs. Bragg and Corporal Bright that this woman was delighted to have something to chatter about.

"I have a stamp in my pocket," he said, foolishly hoping to flatter her by civility, "and if you like I will take your letter to post for you."

She took the stamp, but refused his other offer.

"You're quite a ladies' man, Corporal Bright," she said, "but I will not take you away from Mrs. Bragg."

Both of them flushed angrily, but there was nothing to be gained by bandying words with the woman, and so, merely saying that he was going when Mrs. Tong had come in, the young man took his field-service cap and went away.

"It is striking five," he said, "and I am on duty at five."

Mrs. Tong did not stop long. Her husband was away with the regiment—"B" company alone remaining to find guards, etc.—and she was writing him a letter.

"Young Polly Bragg is carrying on finely," she wrote, "now her husband's out of the way. She was out in the town with Corporal Bright on Monday, and they've been to a photographer's together. Our batman, who was on an errand for me, saw them coming out. And they are not ashamed to be seen flirting together on the barrack-square. Just now I went round to borrow a stamp, and there he was, quite at home with her."

Mrs. Tong's husband was not a consciously mischievous person, but he was a blundering kind of fellow, likely to do just as much harm on occasion as if he had intended it.

When he had read his wife's remarks about the "goings on" of Polly Bragg, he immediately repeated it to some one else.

"I say," he remarked to another sergeant, "by all accounts, Bragg's wife is amusing herself fine, while he's out of the road."

"Oh, who with?"

"Why, young Bright. They've been photographed together, and walked out together in the town; in

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barracks they're as thick as you like, and he hasn't even the sense to keep away from her quarters."

The other sergeant guessed the news came from Tong's wife, and did not feel called upon to believe every word of it; but that Polly Bragg should be flighty he thought likely enough, and Corporal Bright was a "taking" young fellow, very appropriate for a flirtation.

This man, however, was not a talkative person, and what he had been told was not repeated by him. It was unfortunately repeated by a third person.

At the time of Sergeant Tong's telling what he had heard, they had been in the sergeants' mess, and, writing a letter there, was one of the colour-sergeants, Brand—of "F" company—a man who was rather intimate with Colour-Sergeant Bragg. He was a respectable, well-behaved man, and one who would have shrunk from any backbiting; but, when he overheard what was said about his friend's wife, he felt that he ought to take some notice of it; he certainly had no wish to injure Polly Bragg, but, if what was said should be true, he thought his comrade ought to be warned, that he might act as seemed best for him. Of course bad things are done, and foolish girls get led astray by a smart figure and handsome face. If anything of the sort threatened his friend's wife, surely he should be put upon his guard before it was too late.

You see it was unfortunate that the girl herself was one of whom any such accusation would be likely to be believed, more readily than would have been the case had she been different. Had Polly been such a girl as Selina M'Bean, this kind of thing would not easily be credited, nor indeed easily reported. But every one knew that Colour-Sergeant Bragg had chosen his wife from a family that had been carelessly brought up, and that his wife was a silly, conceited girl, caring more for dress and amusement than for anything else in life, and with no real principles to guide her right.

Therefore when the breath of scandal was raised against her, as we know without any foundation beyond great folly, there was a disposition to judge her harshly.

Colour-Sergeant Bragg did not speak in hot haste, but at last he did speak. And it may be imagined that what he said was unpleasant hearing for his comrade.

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To tell the truth, Bragg was naturally of a jealous temper, and since his marriage he had begun to wonder, when it was too late and he should have banished any such wonderings, whether he had not been rash in his choice of a wife. She was over-fond of pleasure, he found, for a married woman, though she was no fonder of it now than she had always been, and certainly Colour-Sergeant Bragg might have discovered that long ago.

The absence of the regiment on this special duty, within a few months of his marriage, was a misfortune to Bragg. He had often wondered how his wife would pass the time away, for his absence left her, of course, without much work to do and without her natural companion.

Finally, it must be remembered that Bragg, though a smart soldier and fine, straight young man, was not at all handsome in the face; he was in fact ugly, with a manly, not unpleasant ugliness. And he attached great importance to the fact of his plain appearance. When the whisper of his wife's partiality for Corporal Bright reached him, he remembered how handsome the young fellow was, and that memory seemed to make the report more credible.

If he did not actually believe it, he dreaded that there "might be something in it," and he was made furiously miserable.

V

SERGEANT BRAGG'S RETURN

When Mrs. Tong knocked at Mrs. Bragg's door that afternoon to ask for the loan of a postage-stamp, we know that Corporal Bright had, as a matter of fact, only just arrived. Mrs. Bragg had not even handed him the half-sovereign, to pay him which she had been foolish enough to let him come to the quarters.

Of course she did not hand it to him before Mrs. Tong's face; in fact, both she and the young man were too much irritated and confused by the woman's spiteful insinuations to remember anything more about the half-sovereign just then.

Then Corporal Bright had gone out; so that the money was still unpaid.

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A note came the day but one after that unlucky afternoon, from the photographer, informing her that the proofs were ready. That of the panel-picture was rather large to send by post, would she mind calling to see it? At the same time she could have the cabinets.

Mrs. Bragg was busy in the morning, and in the afternoon the colonel's wife came round the quarters and kept her. So that it was past three o'clock by the time she was able to set off for the town.

At the Union Art Galleries a disappointment awaited her.

The panel-portrait of the princess that had first tempted her was framed in a very showy fashion, with a deep mount of crimson plush, set in an open-work "Florentine" frame. When the price had been mentioned, the silly girl took it for granted that a similar frame was included.

To-day she learned her mistake.

"And about the frame?" asked the artist, when the proof had been duly examined and approved. The portrait was agreed both by him and Mrs. Bragg to be very satisfactory.

"How about the frame?" echoed the girl.

"Well, I suppose you want it framed, don't you?"

Of course she did. It would not be much use to her without being framed.

"I thought you were going to frame it like the other one," said she, faintly.

"Like the princess's? Certainly, if you choose that style. Twenty-five and six, that style runs."

He took out a note-book, as if to book the order, and poor Polly turned scarlet. She saw her mistake, and was ashamed to avow it. How the man would stare at her if she were to tell him she had expected to get picture and frame and all for thirty shillings!

"What other styles have you?" she stammered. "Perhaps I might prefer one of them. I don't care to copy the princess's altogether."

She had just said that she had supposed it was just in the style of the princess's that the picture was to be framed!

The man, of course, guessed the error into which she

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had fallen, and was half irritated, half scornful on account of it.

He showed her specimens of other styles, but without any of the pleasant flattery and deference he had lavished on her before she had let herself into his clutches.

None of the frames were cheap. It does not pay a photographer to sell cheap frames. The least expensive was half a guinea; and that Polly chose, averring that it suited the picture best. She hoped the man would help her by agreeing that it did so; but he would say nothing of the kind.

"Naturally you must consult your own taste," he said, with the air of not thinking much of it, "but to my eye that style of frame is rather poor for a high-class portrait such as this."

With a thinly-veiled sneer he then booked the order.

"The portraits were to be one pound twelve and six," he remarked, "the frame half a guinea, makes forty-three shillings; less the deposit of ten shillings. Half a crown a week for one quarter, is it not? And we say nothing about the odd sixpence. Will you pay the first instalment now?—it is more usual."

Mrs. Bragg said she would, and the half-crown was paid, the sum being entered on an "instalment card" that had been prepared for her.

It left her with sixteen shillings in her purse, ten of which belonged to Corporal Bright. It was the last day of the month; on the following day the other man would call for the first five shillings on account of the musical album. But that fact Polly entirely forgot. It was not nearly a month since she had bought the album, and she fancied the first payment would not be expected till a month from the date of her having done so.

It was quite dusk when Polly came out of the photographer's, and dark by the time she was mounting the Citadel Hill. A hundred yards from the gate she was overtaken by Corporal Bright, and he slackened his pace to walk on with her.

"Well, have the photos turned out a success?" he inquired. "I suppose you have the proofs by this time."

He glanced at her hand, in which she held one of

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those stiff, glazed paper packets in which photographers send out their specimen copies.

"I have one copy here," she answered; whereupon, of course, the young man asked if he might see it. They were close to a lamp, and she handed it to him. They both stood still under the lamp, and the photograph was examined.

"It is very nice," said the young man, "but not nice enough. There is not half as much expression as there ought to be."

That was very true. But it was not the photographer's fault. To tell the truth, there was not a great deal of expression in poor Polly's face. She had tried to put as much as possible into her face while she was being taken, but no one can do more than their best.

"Oh, do let me give you that half-sovereign now, at last," said Mrs. Bragg. "I did not like to give it you before that spiteful Mrs. Tong the other day, and I have not seen you since."

At last the money really was repaid. Just as the money passed from her hand into his, a cab went by, and disappeared round the corner into the Citadel.

Then Corporal Bright asked if he might not keep the photograph, and very unluckily she said he might. He asked for it as though it were a great favour, and that flattered the girl into folly. He slipped it within his tunic, and after a word or two of farewell they parted.

When Mrs. Bragg reached her own quarters she saw that some one was there before her. When she did not take the key with her, it was generally left at her father's, on the other side of the barrack square.

"Perhaps it's father," she said to herself. . . . "Why, Jack!" It was her husband.

She would really have been ever so glad to see him, but on the table lay that unlucky book; her husband had opened it, and it was giving out the "Bogie Man" with great spirit. She knew questions would be asked about it, and that confused her.

"Why, Jack, whatever has brought you home?" she cried. The table was between them, or she would have gone and kissed him. But he did not look as if he wished to be welcomed.

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"Shut the door," he said surlily, "we need not let all the barracks hear us."

"Why, what are we going to say that there's to be such a mystery about?" But she shut the door and prepared for a "row."

"'Hush, hush, hush,'" jangled that horrid book, "'it is the Bogie Man.'"

"I'll tell you," began the miserable and angry man, "what has brought me home. The tales of your 'goings on!'"

The girl grew deadly pale, and her knees shook under her. She felt sick, and her tongue felt dry in her mouth.

"What do you mean?" she stammered.

"Oh, you can't guess? Of course not. You never thought people had eyes and ears. The cat was away, so the mice would play."

"Who's the other?" she asked, knowing well what was the matter now.

"How dare you play the fool with me like that? Did I not see you with him outside the barrack-gate ten minutes ago? You gave him your photo, and I see he has given you his. I suppose the album was a present too!"

In her folly she caught at that explanation; how else could she account for it?

"Yes," she stammered, "it is a present."

"Well," cried her husband, "your nerve beats everything. You admit he gave it you?"

"I never said anything of the kind. My cousin Lizzie sent it me."

"I saw you touching hands," the angry man went on; "he gave you money."

It was in vain for her to deny this. He evidently disbelieved her. She would have offered to let him search her pocket, but that she remembered there was in it the photographer's instalment card.

"I *know* that man has paid money *for* you; I heard of your walks with him, and of your going together to be photographed."

"Oh, but we did not; we did not indeed, Jack. We met by accident."

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"Accident! So you find you have to admit being there together."

Some garbled account of what had taken place was told him.

"I shall find out for myself," he cried; "I'll get at the truth yet."

And tearing Corporal Bright's photograph out of the album, which was jigging out the last maddening strains of "Tarara-boom-deay," he rushed out of the room.

VI

WORDS

As he crossed the barrack-square, Bragg met Corporal Bright himself, who was going towards the orderly-room with one of the orderly-room clerks.

"I want a word with you," said the colour-sergeant roughly.

"All right, keep your hair on," retorted the other, who was rather surprised at seeing Bragg at all, and had hardly a suspicion as to what had brought him.

"You have a photograph that I will thank you to return. And there's your own property," said Bragg in a voice almost tremulous with passion.

He had a confused knowledge that he was a fool thus to publish his quarrel, and yet he could not keep from such folly. Nay, the very sense of it made him more senseless.

"Oh, you're mistaken," retorted Bright, provokingly, "this is a photo of me, but it is not my property, nor yours, I fancy. I can hardly return your photo, for you have never honoured me with a copy."

He also was angry, but outwardly he seemed calmer than the wretched Bragg. Still he told himself he was going to put up with no bullying from Bragg; as for his companion, the man enjoyed the "sport" of such a quarrel, and so long as the two N.C.O.'s did not come to blows he did nothing to soothe them.

"Give me that photo," demanded Bragg. His voice was so unsteady that he could hardly speak; he could only utter the shortest sentences.

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"What photo?" asked Bright, with the same irritating superficial appearance of coolness.

Then Bragg made a rush at him. The corporal's tunic was partly unbuttoned, and, as Bragg tore at it, one or two of the buttons became unfastened, one gave way altogether, and the photograph dropped out upon the ground. There was a sort of scuffle for it, and Bragg thought his enemy would pick it up before him. He set his foot hard upon it to prevent his doing so.

"You brute," cried Bright, "God help your wife!"

Then Bragg struck him violently, full upon the jaw, so that Bright's teeth rattled in his head.

So far, the man who had been with Bright had stood on one side, affecting not to hear what was being said; but he was himself a non-commissioned officer, and could not abet a regular fight. So now he interfered.

. . . . . .

"On my word I tried not to fight with him," said Corporal Bright, with only very partial truth. He had been so ill-advised as to call on Polly and try to explain what had happened. That he had visited her after the fight was, of course, ultimately well known to every one in barracks. He had not returned Bragg's blow, or even seemed to wish to return it. The only witness of the disturbance had been his friend, and the friend bore witness that Bright had behaved with singular temper and calmness. Colour-Sergeant Bragg was under arrest, but Bright was not.

Bragg would have to be tried by court-martial, and it would certainly go hard with him. For, as an aggravation of his "crime"—every fault is a crime in the army; it is a crime to commit a murder, and a crime not to draw rations when you are detailed for it—it turned out that his absence had been without leave.

When his friend had told him what had been said concerning Mrs. Bragg he at once applied for a pass, but had been refused; the fact was he really could not be spared just then. He was told a pass should be granted if he would apply again in a week or so.

But he had not been able to wait. By consulting the railway-guides he found that it was possible to reach

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Dartport in four hours, and that a night-mail would enable him to be back with the regiment by two o'clock in the morning. After making some arrangements with another N.C.O., Bragg had started off. But now his row with Corporal Bright made it impossible for him to return as he intended.

To save time he had, on arrival at Dartport, taken a cab from the station, and as he drove in it along Union Street he noticed the Art Galleries at which his wife had been photographed. It was there that almost all the garrison went when they wanted their portraits taken, and it now struck him that this must be the place whither Polly had been with Corporal Bright. He called to the cabman to stop, and went into the studios. Unluckily, the artist who had taken his wife's picture was engaged, and he was accosted by a boy-clerk.

"Mr. Collodon is engaged," said the lad; "can I do anything for you, sir?"

"I think," said Bragg, "that this is where a lady, Mrs. Bragg, had her photo taken quite recently."

The boy thought this was another customer, attracted by the fame of Mrs. Bragg's picture.

"Oh yes, sir! Panel-size it was!"

"I suppose ready money's the ticket for these affairs, eh?"

"Not at all, sir, if the easy-payment-system is more convenient. The lady is having hers on those terms."

"She has not paid for hers yet, then?"

"A deposit has been paid. A deposit of ten shillings. The gentleman paid that."

"The gentleman in uniform that came with her?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy. He had only been present during part of the interview when Corporal Bright had paid the half-sovereign. Nor had he been near enough to hear all that had been said. Naturally Bright had not talked in a loud tone when making his offer to supply Mrs. Bragg's "forgetfulness" of her purse. He really thought, now it was so to speak suggested to him, that the "gentleman in uniform" and "the lady" had come as they went together.

"Both lady and gentleman were photographed, weren't they?"

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"Oh yes, sir. They were both much pleased with the pictures."

Then, with black rage and despair in his heart, the wretched, jealous husband hurried back to his cab. He quite believed that Polly and Bright had gone by appointment together to the studios, and together had been photographed.

As he drove up the hill to the Citadel he passed them.

What had he better do? Would he stop the vehicle, and then alight and confront them? He felt that a "scene" would be a result of this procedure, therefore he abandoned the idea. He felt, however, desperate, and he could scarce control his anger. The cab hurried along to its destination, and on reaching his quarters he found that the door was locked. He obtained the key, entered, and waited impatiently for his wife's return, and then ensued the stormy meeting which we have mentioned.

VII

TALK AND TEA

The day after Carry Martingale's piano and furniture had been delivered she wrote a note to Selina M'Bean begging her to come to tea. She was determined to lose no time in letting her friend see that she had some things at all events that that friend had to be without. Mrs. M'Bean accepted, and Carry set about preparations for entertaining her on rather a noble scale.

Many of us have found that wants that have hitherto lain dormant are apt to be precipitated, as it were, by anything in the way of entertainment. Our breakages are then brought home to us, and we realise that we have not nearly as many silver spoons as we had fancied. Mrs. Martingale discovered that she was "short of" several things which, she told herself, were indispensable.

She did not feel inclined for a long *tête-à-tête* with Selina M'Bean, so it was necessary to ask people to meet her, and (she assured herself) it was really more economical to invite them all on the same day than to have them on different days. As it happened, all whom she invited accepted, so that she found there would be nine for tea,

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and her best tea-set, which had been a wedding present, had only half a dozen cups. It was complete, with china tray, tea-pot, cream-jug, slop-bowl, and sugar-bowl, but, as usually is the case with those sets, there were only the six cups and saucers. Carry had quite forgotten that, while asking the eight friends. She tried hard to match the cups, but failed. In the last shop she tried there was a lovely complete set, with a pattern very like that of the chintz that she had got for her parlour-curtains, because it matched so wonderfully with the wall-paper. Carry thought it would have a very "complete" appearance to have the tea-things *en suite*, she dropped a word or two to that effect, and the shopman informed her that in fashionable houses in London just now no lady thought herself properly provided unless she had a tea-set to match each of her afternoon gowns!

"The other little set would do then for the coffee," she thought to herself, and she finally fell a victim to the tea-things that matched her curtains and paper. She had not originally thought of having coffee, but it would be quite "a waste" not to use the pretty little short-set.

As she went home she did think a little as to the difficulty this fresh purchase would make in the provision of the instalment for the furniture. But she had not paid for the china, the man having said that the set had only just arrived from the makers—it was the very latest thing—and no invoice had arrived yet. He could not, therefore, tell the lady to a shilling what the price was, but he could assure her it was not *more* than twenty-two and six. He begged she would not trouble about the payment till he had sent her the account.

Some very pretty "chair backs" caught her eye in one of the Union Street shops as she returned. And amongst them were some exactly like the curtains and wall paper that she had bought the tea-things to match. She remembered she wanted some cotton and went in to buy half a dozen reels, which would only be elevenpence. When she had bought them she asked to see the "chair-backs."

"I do not intend to buy any to-day," she said, "but I should like to look at them, as they match my curtains."

"They are only now come. These are all we have,"

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said the man. "It is a very uncommon pattern. One and eleven three farthings, madam. And there is a sweet apron, with shoulder-straps and lace to correspond, at two eleven three."

The apron was very smart. With it she would be just like the London ladies, her costume matching everything—tea-set, curtains, paper, and the chair-backs—which would "bring the suite into correspondence" also.

For these ready money had to be paid, and it left her very "short."

The tea-party was quite smart. The cakes and confectionery, of course, could not be inferior to the china, and they came from the most expensive shop in Dartport. Every one knew the look of Marks' confectionery, and Carry could not bear not to have it. She was quite surprised to find how much it came to.

A difficulty had cropped up almost at the last minute about tea-spoons. She had quite forgotten them. She had six real silver ones that her husband's mother had given them, and there were a few very common ones for kitchen use; the six silver ones would not be enough, and the kitchen ones were out of the question. She had no neighbours nearer than the Citadel from whom she might have borrowed a few, and the Citadel was too far away; moreover, she did not want it said there that she had not enough of her own; they would think everything else was borrowed—the tea-set and all.

Putting on her hat, she went as far as a pawnbroker's where she had often seen good second-hand plate.

"I want a few tea-spoons," she explained. "Good ones, but not new. Good electro."

"We generally have plenty, but we had our quarterly auction yesterday," said the man, "and we are cleared out. These are all we have. They're very poor."

He showed her some thinly-washed iron spoons. They were not much better than her own kitchen ones.

She did not seem to fancy them.

"I have a dozen real silver ones, cheap," said the man. "Silver has come down terribly, you see, since they took the duty off. A year ago I should have got three guineas for that dozen. I'll let you have them now for forty shillings."

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He handed her the twelve spoons tied together in a little bundle, and she noticed that they had "C. G." engraved on them—her maiden initials. If she had them people would think they had been hers before her marriage. The spoons were shell-pattern, and were really handsome and cheap at the price asked. Carry told herself it would be quite extravagant to miss such a bargain.

"If you like to put them on one side for me," she suggested, "I might take them off your hands at the end of next month—my money comes in then. I only wanted a few cheap ones to-day, for a few friends are coming to tea, and I'm short of spoons. I'm sorry you do not seem to have anything in that line."

"You had better take these now," said the man; "we don't care for putting things aside when we are not sure after all of their being taken. I'd rather you took them, and wait a week or two for the money."

"No, thank you," replied Carry. "I really would not care to take them at present. If, as I say, you could keep them for me, I would be able to take them at a more convenient time. I admire them very much, but just at present I have not enough money to pay for them."

"Well, as I told you, you can have them now, and you can pay for them another time. I always like to oblige a customer; so take them with you," the man replied, and he proceeded to tie them in a parcel.

Alas! she did end by taking them. And the spoons added greatly to the *éclat* of the tea-party.

Carry saw that nothing was lost on her guests. The new furniture was very much admired, and the piano was played upon. One friend—who had no piano of her own—did, indeed, hint that it was rather out of tune; but Carry did not pay much attention to her. She contrived to direct their notice to the curtains, paper, chair-backs, and tea-set all matching; that her own costume matched them also could not escape attention.

Full justice was done to the smart confectionery, though Carry herself affected "not to care much for Marks' cakes." "Home-made," she said, "were much nicer, but we were never brought up to be in the kitchen, and my cook is not up to anything but the very plainest things." Which was indeed very true; for her "cook"

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was the old charwoman, who was up to very little indeed.

She observed with delight that her own maiden initials on the spoons were noticed by everybody, though nobody said anything. And she was not displeased to see Jane Bennett examining the hallmark to see if they were really silver. She became quite patronising to Selina M'Bean, for she remembered that Selina had no piano, that Selina's spoons were only electro, and that nothing in Selina's parlour matched particularly well. And Selina's cakes had been bought at a third-rate baker's near her home.

VIII

MISSING!

One of her friends, and one of the least good-natured, remarked rather unkindly that it was odd Carry had not had her parlour so well furnished for her husband's enjoyment before he went abroad.

"I should have felt inclined to wait till he was coming home," she added, "as I had not had the things while he was here."

Now this girl was, Carry knew, a dreadful gossip, and she had a slight acquaintance with Carry's mother-in-law. It now occurred to Carry that the girl might go tattling to old Mrs. Martingale.

She grew rather red, and, without much premeditation, told a lie by way of explanation.

"The new furniture is a wedding present," she said, "from one of my own relations, who was abroad when we married. She told me, at the time, she would wait till her return from India to send me her present, so she could choose it herself. She's my godmother."

The ill-natured friend looked rather abashed, which was such a triumph to Carry that instead of feeling ashamed of her lie she added a lean-to. "I dare say she would have hurried home had she known you were so impatient for my present," she said.

While she was speaking a meek knock was heard at the door, and presently the charwoman entered, holding

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a note by the corner of her apron. It was unmistakably a bill.

"Miss Gussitt, the dressmaker, sends this, and the boy is waiting for an answer," said the old woman, loudly.

The girl, who had tried to make herself unpleasant and been snubbed, said—

"Poor Miss Gussitt! I feel for her; I really do. She is so hard-working, and her old mother is so dependent on her. And she has such difficulty to get her money *from some of those she works for.* It is a great shame that those who can afford every luxury should keep back what she wants for necessaries."

This remark was not addressed to young Mrs. Martingale; it was supposed to be said in a low voice while she opened the note. But then poor Carry heard it, and blushed scarlet as she read the note. It said—

"DEAR MADAM,

"I am truly sorry to trouble you, and you may be sure I would not do so if I could help it; but a creditor of my own is pressing me very hard for settlement, and I can only meet his claim by getting in what is owing to me. If you could even let me have one pound on account it would be a real boon. Apologising for venturing to trouble you, and trusting to your kindness to do what I ask,

"I am, madam,

"Yours respectfully,

"AMELIA GUSSITT."

Carry finished the note, then read it again. She had not a pound to send.

"There is no answer," she said. "Tell the boy I will go and see Miss Gussitt to-night."

Then she turned to her guests—

"I am letting Miss Gussitt make a coat for me," she explained, "and there is a difficulty about the trimming. She wants to see me about it."

The girl who had said the piano was out of tune looked determined not to believe this, and the others seemed determined to look as if they did believe it.

"Will you not play something, Selina?" said Carry.

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"I do not like to ask Jane again, she's so particular about the instrument. I dare say it has more faults than hers."

Mrs. M'Bean made haste to do as she was asked, and for some minutes there was a cessation of the "scratching" tendency that had begun to manifest itself.

When the piece was finished, Carry gave her another cup of tea. At that moment the charwoman appeared.

"The boy what brought the noo tea-set yesterday is there," she said, "and he says he ought to have left this, and is there any answer?"

She handed Carry an envelope, outside which was printed in large letters, "Union China Galleries."

It was also unmistakably a bill. The girl who had no piano looked offensively intelligent.

"No, no," said Carry impatiently, "of course there is no answer."

Carry had certainly spoken as if the tea-set had been another of her wedding-presents. It was dreadfully evident now that it had been bought only the day before by herself, and almost equally evident that it had not yet been paid for. She was getting horribly wretched; she began to long that her guests would go.

She tried, however, to "carry it off" as well as she could, and Selina M'Bean good-naturedly did what she could to help her. She had a cold, but sang song after song, and kept up quite a chatter of cheerful conversation. Carry did feel very grateful to her.

But the worst of Carry's trials was not over. She had just begun to recover a little from the effect of the two former misadventures, when a third time that hateful charwoman appeared, and in a loud whisper announced that "Mr. Emanuel's man was come for the month's furniture money."

The girl, who had no piano at home, now openly tittered, and everybody looked red and uncomfortable. Carry herself felt the tears of angry pride bursting from her eyes and her lips trembling. In a kind of despair she got up and went out to speak to the man.

When at last she came back her guests were all standing up ready to go. She hardly knew what she said to them, and when they were gone she sat in the midst of her smart

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things with a weight at her heart and a wretched, unavailing longing that she could be without all these things that she knew at last were to cost her so dear.

. . . . . .

Colour-Sergeant Bragg was tried by court-martial on the separate counts of absence without leave and striking another non-commissioned officer. And it was unfortunate that there were circumstances to aggravate each of his crimes. Had he not first asked and been refused leave, the absence would have been less criminal; nor was the absence a simple one. As it turned out, his absence caused a serious neglect of duty also, for, short as it was, a special duty cropped up during his absence, which his chum was not able to discharge for him. And the absence was very deliberate, involving as it did a long railway-journey.

He had no witness on his side in the matter of the assault on Corporal Bright, and the evidence was all against him. He, it was said, provoked the quarrel, and he alone struck any blow, though the provocation he had given to Bright was very great. The court-martial was, naturally, a very notorious one in the garrison, and the name of Mrs. Bragg was bruited about very freely in connection with it.

The result surprised no one. Colour-Sergeant Bragg was reduced, and it was apparent to every one that he went out of the court-martial room a broken-hearted man.

His wife never saw him again. Some said he had slipped away to America; some said he had destroyed himself. But no body was ever found, and no word of his being alive ever reached Polly. Living or dead, he was lost for ever to her. He had told himself that she had ruined his life, and whether he had flung that life away as worthless, or dragged it on in weariness, she never was to know.

Penniless and disgraced, she went back to her father, scarcely wife or widow, and the shadow of misery and deferred hope fell lower and lower upon her. To her father she was by no means welcome, and he did not scruple at times to tell her so; but there was no other possible home for her. Nor was she alone with him for

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long. A few weeks after her husband's disappearance, one bitter winter afternoon she set out about dusk to go and see her sister. By daylight she did not care to show herself, for she knew well that every one blamed her for her husband's ruin, and some laid his death at her door.

She turned sick with misery as she passed the lamp-post by which she had been standing with Corporal Bright when her husband saw them as he passed in the cab; sick as she passed the Union Fine Art Galleries and saw her own portrait in the brightly-lighted window. But soon she noticed an unusual crowd, and heard the newspaper-boys crying a second and special edition of the local evening paper—

". . . Terrible wreck of a man-of-war, sir!" yelled the boys. "Two hundred lives lost, sir! Awful scenes! Special edition, sir!"

And presently the word *Myosotis* caught her attention; it was the name of her brother-in-law's ship. She asked a passer-by what ship was lost.

"The *Myosotis*," replied the man; "three-quarters of the crew are lost, they say."

She hurried on, but the news had reached her sister's house before she did.

Carry Martingale was literally beside herself, and Polly was no good comforter. Neither girl had any real religion, and in a trouble like this everything was, for them, lost together.

Of course there was no certainty that Martingale was among the lost; but from the beginning Carry would hardly listen to the suggestion of his safety. She lost all hope from the first, and perhaps it was after all as well that she did. For, when the first news was supplemented, his name was among those of the drowned.

Carry was a less amiable girl than her sister, and more selfish. It is probable that her love for no one was very deep; but in her way she had loved her manly, handsome husband. She knew he was too good for her, and that he was such a husband as few girls get. And they had been married less than six months!

Underneath all her sorrow lay the more squalid misery of her knowledge that she was now worse than penniless, deeply, inexcusably in debt. That she was ruined she

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understood at once; her home was not only desolate, but it was to be torn from her altogether. All was seized and sold, and she too returned to the unwilling hospitality of her father.

It is probable that in all their lives the two sisters will never learn to hear without shuddering at the expression, "Goods of all kinds on favourable terms. Payment by 'Easy Instalments!'"

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THE PINK-EYED MAN

I

Is there on this earth anything so tragic as the blind folly of man who runs headlong to his ruin, none pushing him, nay, in spite of warnings seemingly irresistible?

And warnings out of and above the natural order are given not now and then but often; if we would only believe in them, if we would only learn to read and recognise them.

A generation ago nurses loved to fill the ears of their children with accounts of warnings, some ghostly, some trivial; that which is to be told here is the wretched history of a dread and plain warning, sent out of all ordinary course of nature, and sent, O wretched man that I am, in vain!

At the birth there were two of us, Ralph Herrick, my twin and only brother, and Hugh Herrick, myself. He came first into the world by a quarter of an hour; but his brief seniority was not to make him any richer than me, for there were no other children and our mother was an heiress.

She died when we were young children, and her younger son became heir to her father, then still living, Sir Hugh Lovat of Ard Rhu, a richer man, though not out of the way wealthy, than our father.

Sir Hugh died when we were thirteen years old, and I immediately succeeded to his lands and took his name; his title of course I could not inherit, and it died with him, for he seemed to have no kindred in the male line. But his will contained one provision that at the time of his death they considered me too young to understand, and

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which I only learned much later. For the present, therefore, it need not be mentioned. The boy Hugh Lovat had thus no reason at all for grudging to his elder brother, Ralph Herrick, that fifteen minutes' seniority, and there was nothing to shadow the friendship of the two. As a matter of fact, until we were nearly eighteen, our mutual affection was exactly that commonly ascribed to twins, and our tastes seemed as much alike as our faces or our figures. These were so wonderfully similar that endless mistakes and endless jokes sprang out of the likeness. If we were at Ard Rhu, Ralph was for ever being taken for the laird, and if we were with our father at Herrick Dale the Yorkshire moorsmen were eternally calling me "the young Squire."

After saying this, it will be set down as vanity if I tell how handsome Ralph was; but it is the simple fact, and in all my life I have never met a face more beautiful than his, or a form so graceful and yet so manly. My eyes are of the same colour as his, a rare shade of very dark hazel that people are apt to call black, and mine are as large as his, but in mine there lacks the depth of expression of his. Our dark hair is the same, our thin, aristocratic noses, and short, full upper lip, like a Greek statue's, and our massive, rounded throats. But the glory of Ralph's face as a lad was his smile, and that I never had. It was like the happy light of the sun upon the Alps, gilding the dread coldness of their beauty with the gladness of God's countenance.

Yes, we were identical, well nigh, in face, figure, in shape, stature, and, as it seemed, in tastes. But in *countenance*—for we make our own countenances though God gives us our faces—and in character, we were, as those said who best knew us, different. For in me was lacking Ralph's sweetness, and, as our father put it, I was the same vase but of commoner clay—the same vase but with a flaw in it.

One difference between us was his open frankness and my reserved secrecy of disposition. For he would always tell everything, and I was apt to wait to see whether it would be better to say nothing. It had saved me some scrapes in my time, but his way made him more lovable.

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II

And now for my dream—the warning that might easily have prevented so horrible, and now irreparable, a tragedy. When Ralph and I were nearly eighteen years old we had a quarrel, and after that we fell apart more and more.

Absurd as it may seem in the case of two lads of such an age, it was about a girl; but absurd or no it is the truth. And perhaps nothing else could have so swiftly and so relentlessly divided us. That I was most to blame is pretty certain; but it was not likely I would admit that, to myself or him, then. And he was not blameless, at all events in his attitude to me, in the matter.

Soon after that quarrel Ralph passed out of Sandhurst into the army, and within six months he was in India. Neither he nor I had ever liked letter-writing, and now he wrote only to our father, who generally gave me the letters to read, and at last, alas! to answer; for by the time his two sons had come of age our father's days were numbered. He had married late, and the Herricks of our branch are not a long-lived stock; though the Ard Rhu Lovats, with the exception of my mother, have mostly been given to see full three-quarters of a century before quitting this world for a better one.

About seven months after my twenty-second birthday my father died, I alone being with him of any kith or kin of his, and the weather being then wild and gusty, for it was late October, and the moors wet with driving rain and sea-fog.

He died at Ard Rhu, never having picked up strength enough after his attack in August to be moved southwards as he wanted; and that was one reason that none of his family were at his side at the last. It's a far cry to Ard Rhu, as well as Lochaber, and he had only seemed to be in any present danger for a day or so before his death.

He died about ten o'clock in the forenoon, it being then dead low-tide, the doctor having paid his visit and gone on his round three-quarters of an hour or perhaps an hour before.

"He'll last the afternoon out," the doctor had said;

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he was pulling on his gloves in the hall, and I was holding the door open for him. "I'll look in as I come back from Port Wrath, and maybe there'll be a telegram to bring for you."

The old butler stood behind me, and we watched the little pawky man get into his carriage and pull his collar up against the wet west wind.

"But he's wrong, Master Hugh," says the butler; "in an hour 'twill be low-water, and the Squire'll never come back with the tide."

Old John belonged to Herrick Dale, and he never called me "Ard Rhu" or "laird" like the tenants and servants on my own place; not even "Mr. Lovat," but always Master Hugh, as he had done ever since I had been breeched. And he was right about my father. The spirit that had gone wavering out after the falling tide came back no more, and, when the flood was risen again about the rocks of our coast, it was fled far upon its way to the unvexed tideless sea on whose edge is lifted up the Great White Throne.

The house of Ard Rhu stands high among the moors, the ground falling away from it to the coast. Far out, to the wet horizon of the ocean, it peers westward; and the rains beat it winter long, and the white fog-shrouds wreath and writhe about it. There is no policy about it scarcely; only a windy clump of black stone-pines a bowshot to the northward to shelter it that way; eastward the moors rise too steep for it to need any artificial protection—that is, doubtless, the theory, anyway there are no trees except that one group half-way between the house and the place where the footpath to Port Wrath goes down the cliff-side. South and west the ground drops, westward to the open sea, southward to Loch Goila.

The driving-road to Port Wrath goes round the pine clumps, and, turning north and then by east a bit, takes three-quarters of an hour to get there. But the footpath goes down the cliff at the Deil's Tochter, having crossed through the windy belt of stone-pines, and it takes you to the village in five and twenty minutes. But it goes by the sands, and at full tide it is impassable.

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III

It has been said my father died about ten o'clock, and I could not bear the long, empty forenoon in the dreary, empty house, so I determined to get out of it and walk to the village.

There was the excuse of having to see the minister; and the house, with its occupants and their occupation about the dead, was for that while unbearable to me.

A howling draught slammed the door to after me, rousing the echoes of the house of death profanely; and I hurried out, glad to shake off the neighbourhood of the house and its insistent, dread association, albeit it was for the sad emptiness of the moor.

It was not raining, though the heather was drenched with moisture and the clouds stooped low and black over the bleak land and leaden sea. But it was singularly clear, with a weird, staring clearness that made one wonder. For one could see far, far away, and had there been any living thing, its movement would have been visible miles away on that wide sea or this wide, treeless moor; but, save myself, no living thing moved.

There was, in truth, a sail upon the sea, just under the horizon, but it was so far away that it seemed motionless, and one could have no thought of living men aboard of it. Rather it seemed like the pale spirit of my dead father hiding itself in the north.

As I went on my way, a kind of amazement fell upon me at my own state. My father lay dead in yonder curtained house, and I, who had always loved him, seemed to feel nothing. My spirit was black and clear like the day, and no rain of sorrow welled in my eyes. In some sense it seemed that I noticed everything with a peculiar sharpness, so that long after that day a dozen pictures remained printed on my mind; and yet at the actual moment of vision their impress was almost unconscious.

Thus long afterwards I remembered how, in Port Wrath, that I passed a seafaring man with his back to me. He was not of the Queen's navy, but out of all doubt a sailor, and he stood on the step of Luckie Falconer's tavern, talking to the tapster within, and, as could be

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seen by the bulge in his cheek, chewing a tobacco-quid.

Scarce past the inn-door Jean Falconer herself came after me to ask news of my father, and I told her quietly of his death, and passed on to the Manse-gate. As I turned to slip the hoop back over the gate-post, Jean had just got back to her own doorstep, and was, as I could see, telling the sad news to the two men, both of whom stood now on the top step in the shadow of the doorway.

Yet all this, so well printed, picture-like, on my memory, was scarce noticed consciously at all when it happened.

My stay was but brief with the minister, and after leaving a word at the doctor's, and sending a couple of telegrams from the post-office, I turned down to the sea again, and struck homewards across the sands. I was in no hurry to get home, but I must be moving, and in the village was too much talk and question.

However, half-way up the rocks by the path that leads from the shore to the boulder that they call the Deil's Tochter, I sat down and rested awhile, for the track is rough and precipitous, and I had come so quick as to be out of breath.

And then a strange thing happened, more strange and terrible by far in reality than it seemed to me at the time.

For ten minutes—perhaps longer, for I was unheeding of the time—I had sat gazing out across the leaden waters, my thoughts anywhere, when a sudden shudder shook me from head to foot; it was not cold, but that convulsive start and shiver that makes folks say that some one walks upon your grave.

To notice such a thing in writing years afterwards would, of course, be ridiculous, but for what next took place almost instantly. My seat was a narrow rock-shelf, my feet rested on the path, itself but a foot and a half wide here, but solid enough, being cut out of the rock; and beyond my toes the precipice dropped, seventy feet or more, on to the lower confusion of boulders on the shore. The precipice at my feet was not sheer, nay, I had climbed up it time and again as a lad. But I had never climbed down it, and it was so abrupt and dangerous with loose

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stones that any one missing his footing on the path would assuredly have tumbled to the bottom.

This is what happened. Scarcely had my whole body been shaken by that strong shuddering when, loosened, I supposed, by the rains coming after an early frost, a huge mass of rock came tearing down the cliff, as if to crush me to death where I sat, or else to hurl me to as sure a death over the edge of the abyss.

The danger was imminently threatening; but it passed quickly, and I stood, for I had leapt to my feet (almost over-balancing myself, almost toppling over the precipice as I did so), staring down on to the rocks beneath me. And back again, stronger than ever, came over me that chill shuddering, like an ague.

And now, once again, for my dream—the warning, if not unheeded, read amiss.

At two o'clock I ate alone, and afterwards wrote to my brother a short, dry letter, with the mere intelligence of our father's death. Then some more letters. Then came the minister, and on his heels the doctor, after which I had supper—or it was set for me—and I went to table taking a book with me, but no more interest to read it than I had appetite.

Between eight and nine o'clock I fell asleep sitting in my chair by the peat fire in my own writing-room; it was then that for the first time I had that dream that, rightly heeded, might have saved an innocent life most dear to me. And this was the dream—

There was a house with tall chimneys stacked together, gables, and low, stone-mullioned windows. No house that I had ever seen in reality or in any picture. It was covered with a tangle of rank, creeping plants, and up to it led a winding coach-track, much overgrown with weeds and briars that skirted an unwholesome ditch or stream, it was not to be seen which. This path led through a little wood or spinney, as from an entrance-gate; and a yard or two from the track on the left hand, among the trees, stood a miniature stucco copy of a classic temple. This was quite ruinous, and on a battered pedestal just within it stood a sylvan faun, much dilapidated, with one arm broken off short at the elbow. The gesture of the remaining arm had in it something horribly and

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unreasonably sinister. The poor deity seemed pointing, with the stump, at its feet, and yet it had the air of turning itself away with aversion or horror, for the stately statue had got pushed askew upon its base.

Behind the house rose a very oddly-shaped hill, like a huge blunt cone, truncated and crowned with the earth-works of a fort. Beyond the slimy ditch, and its rank green sedge, was a flat field, and through it went a railway.

Far away a door clapped and half-roused me from my sleep, but presently the dream continued. It was more like the watching of a picture than the dreaming of a common dream, for in dreams one seems to hear sounds and to witness or share in various motions. But in this dream of mine it was not so.

The picture of the house was the same, but now dim, as though distant, but the bend of the coach-road through the wood was very clear and plain. A summer twilight filtered down through the leaves, but there was no sound of whispering tree or crooning dove, and the man who walked upon the road made no noise of footfall, nor did he seem to get nearer as he came. Behind him, but unsuspected, was another figure.

The final stage is what printed itself deepest into my memory. The same scene, the same surroundings, but the man whom I had noticed first is now stooping, as though to pick up some glittering object, a real or false jewel, from the path. And the other leans over him, a narrow flicker of light from between the laced branches of the trees playing full upon his face. In his uplifted hand he holds an open, single-bladed, large clasp-knife, such as sailors wear; his sleeve is well drawn back, the knife is deftly poised. In one second it will descend into the bent back of the stooping gentleman.

The man with the knife is taller than common, though no way gigantic. He is clad in ordinary, rather shabby, civilian dress; his hands, on which are gloves, are very large and broad, his mouth shaded by a black moustache, and a "Newgate fringe" of black hair beneath his chin. But that which, above all, is horrible in the man's face is the colour and the expression of the little, deep-set, pig-eyes. Their expression is that of implacable, unimpassioned, deliberate, calculating cruelty; their colour

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the yellow-pink of a white rabbit's; and round them the eyelashes were, in their straightness and in their dirty-white colour, those of a pig.

To describe the man over whom he leant in murderous act to strike is unnecessary, *for it was myself.*

IV

From this dream I did not wake abruptly, but by such gradual degrees that it was not easy to say when the drowsy portals of sleep were passed and waking consciousness had succeeded. Waking consciousness is not a slip of the pen, for there was a distant though visionary consciousness before. As has already been said, this dream was unlike others in that, while it lasted, one did not seem to be taking part in its actions, but to be merely the spectator of a tableau.

Nor did it resemble an ordinary nightmare except in being accompanied by a horrible, because helpless and ineffectual, longing to warn the pictured victim of his unsuspected danger—while all the time the victim was myself!

At nine o'clock I was certainly awake and listening to the measured striking of the old clock outside my study door; but how long my sleep had ended I do not know.

The peats still burned red on the hearth, and there was nothing of grim or ghastly about the warm and well-furnished room; save for the abiding consciousness of that Dread Presence upstairs there was nothing about the house to change its usual air of solemn, sleepy comfort.

Presently the old butler came and put whisky on the table and a kettle of hot water on the hob. He said a word or two and went away. And I sat still, pondering on what I had dreamed or seen.

It is the fact that at first the dream had much less effect upon me than it gradually came to exercise afterwards. At the time it seemed a dream and nothing more; an ugly, ill-omened dream, but still a dream.

In after years it asserted itself as the foreshadowing of an inevitable fate.

After a while drowsiness again crept over me, as was

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natural, for my sleep had been brief and disturbed of late, and I went to bed. Before entering my own room to undress, it had always been my custom to go into my father's, who had been fond of sitting reading by his fireside, to bid him good-night; and by force of habit, as it were, I did so now.

How cold the contrast seemed. The grate was chill, and filled with a bundle of fresh fern and heather; there was no light in the room but that of the candle in my hand, that cast grim shadows on the wall; and there seemed a echoing stillness about that presence so familiar and so strange.

All the trappings of sickness—physic-bottles, bed-tables, posies of flowers, and the rest—had been cleared away; save for the silent sleeper on the bed all was as in an unoccupied " spare " room.

There seemed something niggard and heartless about the chilliness of the empty hearth.

My father's face had been a fine one, and death had smoothed out all time's wrinkles; there was certainly nothing ghastly there. But neither was there anything familiar in that white, soulless image. I could not feel that this unheeding statue was my father. My kiss upon his smooth forehead was no more than the touching with one's lips of some stone-carved figure on a tomb.

Soon I left it and laid myself to rest, glad to have done with that sad day, and without any fear of dreams that sleep might bring. Truth to say that day had been for me one of singularly few emotions; bodily weariness and heaviness of the eyes—those had been the prevailing feelings of the day. A peculiar lethargy had seemed to weigh upon my spirits.

Next day broke fair and fine, and my two nearest relations (Ralph excepted) arrived together: my uncle, Roger Herrick, and his son, Reginald, a year or two older than myself, though the father was a good fifteen years younger than mine had been.

On the next day, it being still fine, though with a clear, black sunlessness, we buried my father, the village people from Port Wrath coming unbidden out of respect for the young laird's father. The graveyard, clapped on the hillside, and looking northward over the empty

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sea, is a desolate lone place in common, but was full enough that day.

Just while the first shovelfuls of earth were rattling down on the coffin, again there seized me one of those strong and chill shudderings such as had come over me on the day of my father's death while I sat on the cliff path, but this time with more apparent reason.

Lifting my eyes hastily from the narrow place which was now all the hospitality earth had for my poor father, they fell on the face of the same seafaring man who had stood on Jean Falconer's door-stone. I knew him again by his dress and by his figure, for before his face had been turned from me. Nevertheless I felt an instant persuasion that the face was not now seen for the first time. It was a bad and cruel face, smooth and pallid, except that it was lightly pitted with old pock-marks; and its eyes were bent on me with a hidden, secret expression of dislike and grudging.

Next moment the man had edged his way back into the little crowd and was seen no more.

On the morrow with my uncle and cousin I went south, and was at Ard Rhu no more that winter, or indeed for some time. For, getting the mania of travel, I was out of Britain for the best part of four years, till the May of the year in which my brother and his regiment returned from India. They came in March, and were quartered, as I learned, at Plymport, near to which town Ralph, who was now married and had a son, had taken a house.

Perhaps having, as one must suppose, fallen in love elsewhere, my brother saw the less reason for keeping up his grudge against me; anyway I found, on my return from my wanderings, a letter from him lying at my agent's, dated The Marsh House, near Plymport, and begging me to visit there for as long a time as I could make convenient. It seeming to me that we had been on ill terms over long already, I was glad to write a cordial acceptance, and waited only to get a few clothes after my exile in outlandish places before running down to the West Country.

Our tailor, for my brother and I had ever employed the same, fitted me out, and told me complacently that

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one of the suits I had chosen was the same as the very last Ralph had got from him, and that we were more alike than ever, which put me on the notion of wearing those clothes on my journey down, with some hope of amusing mistakes on my sister-in-law's part, who had never seen me.

When I was buying my ticket at the Paddington Station, a man came near me whose face I had seen the day before, and been then struck by it as familiar. He was a tall, powerful man, of a seafaring appearance, with a smooth, pallid face, clean shaven, but marred by a few old pock-marks; but, what was strangest about him, with eyes as pink as a rabbit's, and long straight white lashes like nothing but a pig's.

My business had taken me to the eastern end of the town on the day before, close to the docks and shipping offices, and there it was, I now remembered, that I had seen this man. We were both in hansom-cabs, and going opposite ways, but, owing to a block in the traffic, had been within two yards of each other and, as it were, face to face, for perhaps two minutes or more. So that I had had more than a passing glimpse of him.

Sitting there in the cab, I had felt this man's eyes fixed on me with a malignant greediness, and in vain had searched my mind for a clue as to his identity.

Nor now could I overtake the recollection of where before we had met. In the train, however, it all flashed across me.

Four years before, standing on Luckie Falconer's doorstep in our street at Port Wrath, and again by the graveside at my father's funeral, the seafaring man with pink eyes, and I, had met each other; but where else? Somewhere.

At Bristol the man came past my carriage, and I felt he was looking for me; and again, at Exeter, he walked along the platform, peering secretly through the windows as if fain to get a glimpse of me. But at Plymport he was not to be seen; anyway, I did not notice him.

A servant came to the carriage-door with a note from my brother regretting that he could not meet the train, as for half an hour he was engaged on a military duty. He had sent his dog-cart and begged me to drive out to the Marsh House and send it back for him.

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"I knew at once you must be Mr. Lovat," said the servant as we drove along, "for you are the very image of the master . . . and you have on a suit like the one he is wearing to-day."

"He's not in uniform, then?" I said, thinking of the "military duty."

"No, sir. Mr. Herrick generally changes out of uniform in barracks before driving home to lunch. When you see him he'll be wearing those very clothes."

We soon shook off the town, and then came a few straggling villas; then it was quite country. Next we turned off the high-road, between two very dilapidated stone gate-posts into a private road, flanked on one side by a small wood or spinney. On the other ran a narrow, unwholesome stream, or ditch, overgrown with green slime, and fringed, on its further side, with sedge. Beyond was a flat field crossed by a railway.

The moment we left the road for this, as I rightly supposed, the approach to my brother's house, its familiarity struck me. But unavailing was my effort to recall where, or how, such a scene had been seen by me before.

A bend in the road, and, a yard or two from the track, appeared through the trees a ruinous stucco copy of a classic temple, in which stood a shabby, peeling statue of a Greek faun. And still haunted as I was by the familiarity of the scene, in vain did I struggle with memory for the clue to it.

In five minutes I was introducing myself to my brother's beautiful young wife, and we were laughing over our absolute resemblance.

"I thought," she said, "when I saw you driving up, that it was Ralph, and that *you* had failed to turn up . . . though a telegram from him arrived ten minutes ago to say the carriage was not to be sent back for him. I suppose he got off quicker than he had expected, and is walking out. You will like to go to your room . . . we won't wait luncheon for Ralph."

But I insisted that we should do so, declaring that I would like to get some of my unpacking done first. Then I went to my room, but instead of unpacking threw myself on my bed and fell, contrary to all habit, heavily asleep.

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And once again, this time too late, came back into my sleeping brain the dream that I had dreamed nearly five years before by the peat-fire in my lonely study at Ard Rhu, on the night my father died. All was repeated: scene and silent, pictured action; wood and road and ditch; ruinous temple and shabby faun; and the stooping figure that was myself, and behind it, as it stooped, the murderous seafaring man with pink eyes; for it was he, despite the civilian eyes, the false black eyebrows, and the false moustache, and the Newgate fringe of black hair around the neck.

With a shriek that filled the house I leapt from the bed awake, and from the winding roadway through the wood came back an answering shriek of mortal agony that seemed its twin and echo.

Then, and not till then, too late, too late, did the significance of the warning dream burn itself in upon my stupid brain. Not mine but my brother's was the stooping figure of my dream; not his but mine was the enemy. For now I knew, indeed long had known, though now only tardily awoke to the bearing of such knowledge in the flash of the supreme horror of this moment, that there was a man in the world who might count me as his foe, a worthless son of old Sir Hugh Lovat, my grandfather, to whom failing me and my issue the lands were willed.

In the wood, on the roadway close by the ruined temple, they found, and I with them, what I knew would be lying there. And with his broken finger the stately faun pointed downwards at the dead, as he turned himself, half grotesquely, askew upon his pedestal.

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ONE POUND REWARD

A SUDDEN torrent of rain had cleared the streets for a few minutes, and outside Kensington High Street railway-station there was, for the moment, hardly any one.

An old lady, well enough supplied with umbrella and waterproof, was one of the last to disappear into the shelter of the station; but, as it happened, it was not only for shelter that she had betaken herself thither. She wanted to catch a train for Ealing, where she resided in great comfort, having a sufficient income, and no one but herself to provide for out of it.

She had spent the afternoon in Kensington, having cashed a cheque at the bank nearly opposite the station (but that was much earlier in the afternoon), and done a little shopping, after which she had attended a meeting. For Miss Eudoxia Faddleby was President of the Society for the Discouragement of Adventitious Aids to Virtue, whose motto was "Virtue is its own reward," and whose meetings took place once a month, at the houses of the respective members, being followed by tea and a little music, or a good deal of conversation. There were only a dozen members, but then the society was in its infancy (which they certainly were not), and they were all single ladies of competent means like Miss Faddleby.

The meeting this afternoon had been at the house of Miss Crumpet, in Phillimore Gardens, and had been uncommonly pleasant. She gave an excellent tea, the little cakes were as crisp as possible, and there were plenty of thoroughly well-stuffed easy chairs. There was an air of cosy comfort about Miss Crumpet herself that matched everything in her house as well as the carpets and curtains matched one another.

The Society for the Discouragement of Adventitious Aids to Virtue had grown out of, or, at any rate, owed its

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origin to, a very different society called the West London Ladies' Home-Aid Guild, which had been started to organise relief among the poor of that region. Finding that the aid so given had been in most cases thoroughly wasted, the ladies were (some of them) much scandalised. They could not abide to think that they had been generally taken in, and began seriously to question the morality of such aid at all. It certainly seemed likely to pauperise the recipients, and after all why should these people be petted and coddled, just because they happened to have come within the radius of the W.L.L.H.-A. Guild's relief? If they would not come to church, keep sober and respectable, and send their children to Sunday-school without these thinly disguised bribes of coal-tickets, soup-tickets, grocery-tickets, flannel-tickets, and the rest, what was the intrinsic value of all the respectability, and church-going, and sobriety?

As none of the West London ladies were provided with an answer to these very difficult questions, a dozen or so out of their number seceded, and founded the Society for the Discouragement of Adventitious Aids to Virtue. It had been found very agreeable to draw up the prospectus, and the list of officers, and even the rules (though not so easy a matter), but perhaps the weak point of the society, as a society, consisted in the difficulty of doing anything in particular in support of its own principles. It was, however, a simpler matter to formulate what must not be done by its members. I daresay it did quite as much as the Early Dining Association, or the Sugarless Tea Guild.

A yard or two behind Miss Faddleby came a youngish woman of a very different class and condition. She had no umbrella or mackintosh, and her clothes were very thin, and threadbare. They were not ragged or disreputable, but they were worn out. Had they, by any possibility, belonged to Miss Faddleby's neat lady's maid, they would long ago have been consigned to the rag-bag. And yet their wearer was much nearer, by birth, to the rank of Miss Faddleby herself than to that of her maid.

She differed also from Miss Faddleby and the lady's maid in having been married. In truth, she had married far too young, in her rashness refusing to listen to prudent

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counsels, and now, having made her bed, she was lying on it. It may be said that it was sufficiently hard at present. "Luck" had held aloof with surly persistence, and sickness and death had come her way, and seemed loath to move on. The young woman was a widow, but (though she had lost children) not childless: God help her for having to say it, there were all too many left.

She was weary and ill herself, though of no definite disease; perhaps only sick with that sickness that hope deferred brings to the sickening heart. But had she been free she would have worked; how could she now work, with those young children clinging to her? And, closer than the children, clung the heavy weight of debt.

This woman (who had once been young and full of hope) was now listlessly returning to what—for lack of other name—she called her home. Her errand, the errand that had called her away from it, had been fruitless. She had been to try and obtain payment for work done for a milliner—she was glad enough, now, to earn a little by such means. But her employer, she found, had herself failed, and such a tiny claim as hers was quite swallowed up in the more imposing claims of others.

Four pounds fifteen shillings! A paltry sum indeed; but how hardly it had been earned, how much had to be bought with it! How bitterly would its loss be felt.

"I am truly sorry for you," the milliner had said, "but, indeed, I am myself penniless. Had I had any cause to fear such a calamity as has overtaken me I would never have robbed you of your work. But ten days ago I feared nothing. It is the modern system of business, credit all round. The firm from which I get all my material has failed, and I have been called upon to pay at once an immense account that would otherwise have been a running one, a little to be paid now, a little then. Even now, if I could get in all due to me, I need not actually fail. But there's no chance of that; ladies who owe me large sums are abroad, or out of reach. Before I could get in a tenth of my dues I should be bankrupt, I am bankrupt in fact. I am truly sorry for you." And she had given the poor woman half a sovereign—all she really had at the moment, so she said. And the poor woman had expected nearly five pounds!

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On the pavement, blown by the wind against one of the thin iron pillars that support the shelter outside the station, lay a folded newspaper, flung aside by some one coming up out of the station. But on it, dropped (as I may as well tell you) by Miss Faddleby, was a purse. And our poor friend, whose name was Raeburn, noticed both. The paper had in fact lain there some little time, and had already been seen by others before her; but the purse had only been dropped half a minute before, and in that half minute no one else had observed it, for the rain had cleared the street. And in that half minute Miss Faddleby had bustled into the station, and trotted down the stairs to the platform; at the very moment that Jane Raeburn found the purse its owner was hurrying into a train that had already begun to move, and into a carriage where she found, as it happened, a friend of her own.

Jane Raeburn picked up the purse, and looked round. There was no one to be seen to whom it would seem to belong, and for some time she was quite uncertain what to do with it. At first she continued her way to her wretched home, and, as she went, ascertained the contents of the purse. There was a ten-pound note, and nine sovereigns. Miss Faddleby had cashed a cheque for twenty pounds, and had spent nearly one pound; the slight change was loose in her reticule, where she believed her purse to be also, where her return half-ticket was, and where her cardcase was, and her pocket-handkerchief. There was nothing in the purse but the note and gold. Nothing to give a hint to its owner.

Nineteen pounds! Nineteen pounds dropped as it were from heaven at poor Jane Raeburn's feet! She had heard of strange bounties, coming (no one knew whence) for the relief of the distressed. Was this such a one? Then she thought of her children, and their bitter need. And she remembered that even if the purse was no heaven-sent bounty, but had merely been lost by some earthly owner anxious to retrieve it, that such earthly owner would certainly offer a reward—a pound or so, perhaps much more. But surely *some* reward would be offered. Then it crossed her memory that she had heard it said by some great political economist, and he was a

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churchman, some high ecclesiastic, that those who were starving had the right to take what was necessary for their life, even though they had to "steal" it, as we should say. She well remembered exactly what he had affirmed. He had admitted that even the starving were amenable to the laws, so that if the starving were caught in the act of stealing bread, that starving wretch would not unjustly be sent to prison, but that was his risk. If he chose to risk that his conscience was free to do so. Was she not starving? She had indeed ten shillings; but what was ten shillings when weeks of rent were owing, and the landlord clamorous and threatening? When there was not an ounce of coal in the oft-searched bin, when there was no candle, no food, no tea, no bed-clothing, and hardly any clothes of any sort—what was ten shillings then?

"One Pound Reward!"

The words seemed to form of themselves in poor Jane Raeburn's ears; they overflowed upon her lips.

"One Pound Reward!" she said to herself, as she passed the closed door and blinded windows of the very bank where Miss Faddleby had cashed her cheque. "One Pound Reward!" she said again, as she turned up by St. Mary Abbot's Church.

And the same formula was on her lips as she pushed open the door of the house where she lodged, and as she climbed the dark and dirty staircase.

It had been a gentleman's house once—rather a grand house, indeed, in the days when there were footpads in Kensington Gore; but it had long ago fallen into squalor and poverty. It was very shabby, very grimy, and very full of poor and wretched lodgers. I do not think they wanted to be dirty. But they had neither time nor means to be clean. In a great city cleanliness costs money, like everything else that is desirable.

"One Pound Reward!" said poor Jane Raeburn, half aloud to herself, as she stood on the landing outside her own room, groping for the keyhole.

"I'll 'One Pound Reward' you," retorted a voice out of the darkness. And only too well did she know whose voice it was. "Now, Mrs. Raeburn, I am come for that rent. I've been a-waiting for you to come in, and I don't intend to wait for nothing. One pound eight is

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owing, and one pound you faithfully promised me should be ready to-day. So you'll kindly 'reward' me."

He laughed as he finished his little speech, but Mrs. Raeburn's landlord had not an agreeable laugh.

* * * * *

The friend whom Miss Faddleby found in the comfortable first-class carriage when she bustled into the train, was not a lady friend. It was Dr. Goodenough.

Dr. Goodenough was a very near neighbour of Miss Faddleby's, and they had a regard for each other, grown out of long acquaintance and some mutual respect; for Dr. Goodenough did respect Miss Faddleby in a measure, though he was apt to think (and to express his thoughts) that she was a goose on occasions. Dr. Goodenough had jeered at the West London Ladies' Home-Aid Society.

"Why can't you give the tea and flannel-petticoats," he asked, "without all this tomfoolery of a society? You don't tell me that the Good Samaritan belonged to the Jericho Mendicity Society?"

And when Dr. Goodenough had so spoken Miss Faddleby had been displeased. She did not think the doctor ought to have alluded to—to—to—underclothing in that coarse way to a lady. And she deemed his quotation of the Good Samaritan profane.

But the doctor had turned up his nose much higher at the Society for the Discouragement of Adventitious Aids to Virtue.

"Lord love us," he cried, "what next? Tommy Blowhard and I will start a Confraternity for the Abolition of Material Discouragements of Vice."

Then, also, was Miss Faddleby offended, for Tommy Blowhard was the doctor's indoor servant.

"Man alive," cried the doctor, in a great heat, "have some pity on our human weakness. Don't we need all the help, adventitious or what not, that we can get to make us good? I do for one; and with it all I don't know that there's much in the way of goodness to brag on."

"As to that, you probably know best," declared Miss Faddleby.

The doctor grinned.

"Well, I admit it. There's no great margin of virtue with all my adventitious aids. I couldn't get on at all

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without them. Nor could you, ma'am. If you had not twelve hundred a year and this house, you'd probably be picking pockets in the Strand."

Miss Faddleby drew herself up.

"If that is so," she said severely, "my honesty is quite worthless. I might as well be a thief."

"By no means," shouted the doctor; "there'd be no trusting you in my house. How the deuce should I make up my second table at whist on Saturdays? Do you think I could invite you to supper when you might be slipping the spoons into your pocket all the time?"

"Really," said Miss Faddleby, "if you are going to insult me after knowing me twenty years——"

The doctor laughed.

"Not a bit of it. You're a very honest woman, and, I repeat, it is far better for the neighbourhood that you should be so. You people are always thinking about yourselves. I look at the neighbourhood. It don't matter to me, to the neighbourhood I should say, how you come to be a decent member of society. It makes no difference to the neighbourhood whether the fact is to your particular credit or no. But the fact itself makes a lot of difference."

"Of course," said the lady, "I cannot hope to talk so loud, or so long as you. For you allow yourself to interrupt whenever you are getting the worst of it——"

"Then I never do interrupt," interrupted the doctor.

"But, nevertheless, virtue which is due merely to external influences is not properly virtue at all."

"It's the best known substitute," declared the doctor.

"For eternal interests it is quite useless," insisted the lady.

"But, bless you," shouted the gentleman, "this ain't Eternity. It is a very important matter, and all that, Eternity is; but, all the same, we have to take other things into account. Eternity may not be directly connected with the rates and taxes, but they have to be paid. Your breakfast ain't necessary for eternal interests, but you'd miss it."

Miss Faddleby considered that the doctor was again becoming coarse. Personal allusions, such as this, Miss Faddleby always did consider coarse.

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"Don't you see," continued Dr. Goodenough, "that it's better for the world at large that folks should be virtuous than that they should be vicious? So that virtue —and by virtue I mean now decent behaviour, honest conduct, and all that is generally the contrary of vice—so that virtue is a great gain, however it be come by. If good conduct can only be secured among some people by old ladies bribing them with blankets and grocery-tickets, let the blankets and grocery-tickets be given; the good conduct mayn't be any great use to the bribed people's souls, but it is a great advantage to society."

"You admit that such virtuous conduct is of no use to the people's own souls, then!" said the lady, triumphantly.

"I admit nothing of the kind. I said if it were so. I think it is of advantage even to their twopenny-ha'penny souls. For the good behaviour creates a habit, and that is a great help. A man who has been decently behaved for eighteen months is far more likely to be well-behaved for two years (even if the blankets stop) than a man who has not been decently behaved at all."

Dr. Goodenough was no longer in practice. He lived in ease and well-earned retirement at The Elms, next door to The Cedars, where Miss Faddleby resided. He was a little man, rather stout, and short in the neck (a fact of which, in a moment of intolerant provocation, Miss Faddleby had once reminded him), and he was peculiarly neat and dapper in his person; he was very fond of his own opinion (very justly as he thought), and somewhat loud in expressing it. He rode rather rough-shod over his acquaintance, but he was very submissive to Mrs. Assydrop, his cook-housekeeper.

Dr. Goodenough argued with Miss Faddleby all the way home in the train; he knew she had been to a meeting of that "piffling society," and he had a whole series of new reasons for sneering at it.

Poor lady, she was quite relieved when they got to Ealing, but the doctor saw her to her door.

"There are just the same reasons," harped the doctor, "for external aids to virtue as there are for the present punishment of crime, viz., the public profit. You might as well say that we ought to leave burglars to their due reward hereafter."

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"Ah, but then," objected Miss Faddleby, with a practical grasp of the situation, that quite startled him, "they might repent, and then they would not have been punished anywhere!"

"Of course; but there's one consolation for you," said the doctor, "that sort of chap never does repent till he feels the drop begin to give under his feet."

He knew it was a brutal remark, but he wanted to punish her.

"And then," he added triumphantly, as the argument occurred to him, "that applies to my side as well as yours. If we are to punish burglars now, lest they should repent and diddle us out of punishment altogether—and after all I suppose you think one ought to wish for such repentance?"

"Oh, certainly," declared the lady hurriedly. Though she did feel that she would like some present punishment to overtake the as yet uncaught burglar, who had recently broken into The Hollies not two hundred yards down the road.

"Well, just for the same reason we ought to give rewards even here below to the virtuous, lest they should ultimately go to the bad and lose all reward anywhere."

This seemed to Miss Faddleby rather a depressing view of the question of reward, and she was just going to say so. But she had occasion just then to use her handkerchief, and was opening her reticule in search of it.

"Gracious! Dr. Goodenough!" she cried, "some one's picked my pocket. My purse is gone!"

"Of course," said Dr. Goodenough, "you'll offer a reward. A pound, eh?"

"Well, I don't know about a reward; the money is mine whoever finds it," replied the lady, not forgetting that she was President of the Society for the Discouragement of Adventitious Aids to Virtue.

"And being yours, you'd like to get the bulk of it back again," retorted the doctor, also remembering the society. "I should say two pounds reward—at all events, thirty shillings."

"But the principle?"

"It's an excellent principle. If a dishonest person finds it, you are teaching him that honesty is the best

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policy. If an honest poor person finds it, you are securing his reward for his virtue. And it would be hard that the honest person should get no profit, or rather lose, by being more honest. If a well-off person finds it he will not take the reward."

Miss Faddleby was very well off, but no one likes to lose a purse with nearly twenty pounds in it. She would suffer no inconvenience by its loss, no inconvenience that she would feel—as it was, she never spent her income—but none the less did she feel a great repugnance to thus wasting so large a sum, for to lose it was, in truth, to waste it. She could, she assured herself, do much good with it. Nevertheless, she did not see how she, the first president of the S.D.A.A.V., hot from one of its meetings, could consistently offer a monetary reward for the restoration to herself of what was her own. That poor consistency of ours! "Of course," she said, "I would pay all expenses."

The doctor snorted.

"One thing is certain," he said, "we had better go into Kensington again and see the police."

It was not yet seven o'clock, and there would be a train in a few minutes. By this time the lady had remembered that she had not put the purse into her reticule as she had intended. The downpour of rain had come on, and, while she was getting up her umbrella, she had doubtless dropped the purse. It was not necessary to believe that it had been stolen; it might have been picked up by some perfectly honest person.

At the Kensington police-station she described the purse, and stated the amount of its contents.

"Do you know the number of the note?" inquired the Inspector.

"Well, no," the lady admitted, and the Inspector smiled.

"Ladies never do," he said; "I thought I'd better ask you. Is there any reward?"

"I suggested thirty shillings—a pound at all events," put in the doctor.

But Miss Faddleby blushed.

"Of course," she repeated, "I would pay any expenses. I do not approve of the principle of a reward."

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"Expenses!" snorted the Doctor.

"There will be no expenses, madam," said the Inspector. "A purse has been brought here. I have hardly any doubt from the description and the amount that it is yours. Perhaps you will come with me."

There is no doubt the Inspector thought Miss Faddleby very mean. He need not really have taken her and the doctor to Mrs. Raeburn's lodgings, but he did take them.

"This lady," he said, when they stood in that dismal room, "is the owner of the purse you found this afternoon. There is no reward."

The ceiling was very black, and so, alas! was the grate, in which there was no fire; the bitter cold was met only by the thin and threadbare garments of the wretched mother and her hungry children. There was no sign of food. There was no light but that reflected from the street lamp outside, and the biting frost had frozen their breath upon the glass of that curtainless window.

"There is no reward," said the Inspector. Certainly he thought the lady very mean.

"That," stammered she, "is a matter of principle."

Heavens, how the wind whistled in that rattling window-frame! "Heaven defend us from your principles!" muttered the doctor. And the Inspector also thanked Heaven that he did not set up for a religious man.

"Perhaps you'll go back to the police-station with the Inspector?" growled Dr. Goodenough. "I want to ask this poor woman some questions. I am a doctor, you see, or was one," he explained to Jane Raeburn, "and I hear that child coughing badly."

"But I want to speak to her too," said Miss Faddleby; but she went out of the room as far as the landing with the Inspector. "Could you," she whispered, "let me have my purse now. I want something out of it."

With great alacrity the officer produced it. Then Miss Faddleby slipped back again.

"Please step outside a moment, Dr. Goodenough," she said. And the doctor, for some reason, obeyed her.

"Here, my dear, is the note," whimpered the President of the S.D.A.A.V.; "indeed you must let me give you

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that at once. I had no idea—but this is not a reward, nothing of that kind."

"She's an excellent old fool," whispered the doctor, on the landing.

And the Inspector wagged his head very pleasantly. Presently Mrs. Raeburn came out, and Miss Faddleby was to be seen nursing the baby (very awkwardly) on the bed.

"She's going out to get some things, Dr. Goodenough," called out the old maid; "I am minding the children while she's gone. Will you help me, or what?"

"I am going to the nearest chemist for some cough mixture," replied the doctor.

But it turned out ultimately that the chemist sold quite a number of unusual things, such as beefsteak, and port wine, and fresh rolls of butter.

This was not the end of Jane Raeburn's acquaintance with Dr. Goodenough and Miss Faddleby. But very shortly afterwards the old lady resigned the Presidentship of the Society for the Discouragement of Adventitious Aids to Virtue.

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THE GRANDCOURT DIAMONDS

I

THE Grandcourt diamonds were so very valuable that no one out of London ever saw them. Her ladyship said they were more trouble than they were worth; and if that were true, they must have been troublesome indeed, for they were worth a king's ransom.

When the Marchioness went to Court (which was often, as she was Deputy Mistress of the Warming Pan, the old Duchess of Knightsbridge being imbecile) she drove first to Messrs. Duckling and Hunt, the family bankers, and there put on the diamonds, which were not fetched from the strong-room till she got there. Then she drove on to the palace with a detective (in ostentatiously plain clothes) sitting back to the horses.

The detective was generally plain, too, her ladyship noticed; and any one could have told him by his boots.

After the drawing-room Lady Grandcourt again took the bank in her way home, and the jewels were securely deposited in their safe in the strong-room. They had never been re-set for a century, as no Marquess of Grandcourt had cared to face the risk of substitution during re-setting. So the mounting of the diamonds was handsome, but old-fashioned and peculiar. It made them easy to recognise, and easy for the illustrators to make pictures of them. Thus the "Crown-and-Court-Chat" artist, who had never seen them, had a picture of them at least once each season, on the head of an aquiline beauty of the Marie Antoinette type—the real Lady Grandcourt being plain enough and sensible enough to dislike being photographed. Her snub-nose was full of expression, but it was not at all courtly or crownly.

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In the country no one had ever seen the Grandcourt diamonds for over half a century. The present Marquess had only married on succeeding to the title, five or six years ago, during which time nothing had happened at Court Grand to necessitate the appearance of the jewels. His uncle, who had reigned forty years, was a bachelor; and Blunderbore Adelbrand, the third Marquess, had for many years been a widower.

Now, however, it was confidently predicted by "Lady Araminta" in the *Inner Circle* that the famous Grandcourt diamonds would be seen in the country. And for once "Lady Araminta" (who happened to be Lady Grandcourt's maid) was right, having on this occasion exceptional opportunities for being so.

Court Grand, as every one knows, is five miles from Muddlehampton, the fine old country town of Pudshire, and it had long been without a lunatic asylum, a crying need which the *Daily Mudland Monitor* had for years been declaiming against. The first wing had now, at long last, been built and almost paid for, and the second was to be proceeded with at once; meanwhile the Duke of Middlesex had promised to come down to open the finished wing (for which eleven male lunatics and seventeen female were in readiness), and was to stay at Court Grand for the occasion. The Mayor (who was also editor and proprietor of the *Mudland Monitor*) had hoped to secure the Sovereign; but the grief of Majesty was poignant at being compelled by engagements elsewhere to decline "acceding" to this loyal request.

At first the Mayor, who had intended to be knighted, was indignant, and for five minutes thought seriously of becoming a Radical, if not a Socialist. But he thought better of it and flew his hawk at lower, though still Royal, game, and secured the Duke of Middlesex. His Royal Highness belonged to that section of the reigning house which is rather accustomed to be asked to perform public ceremonies originally intended for Majesty itself.

With H.R.H. at Court Grand it was urged by the Marquess that her ladyship must have down the diamonds.

"I don't see why in the least," protested Lady Grandcourt. "The Duke has seen them fifty times at the palace, and the pearls are much more becoming."

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"My dear Squeaky," said his lordship (Lady Grandcourt had been christened Victoria Alexandra, after her royal sponsors), "it's all very well; but you'll have to sport them. I admit all you say about the bother, though I think the risk is really nil with that burglar-proof safe; and, personally, I don't care for diamonds, while the setting of ours is Megalosaurian, if not earlier. But you must wear them. You must indeed. Your DUTY, my dear Squeaky, as Marchioness of Grandcourt, is to wear those diamonds whenever such an occasion as this arises. At Muddlehampton there will be a ball; that ball you will open with the Duke; and on your poor head those gems must be. I might as well think of dancing there in my shirt-sleeves and stocking-feet, as you without your diamonds."

"All right, Puggy," she said (Plantagenet Hildebrand Otho was his name). "If I must, I must, as the girl said when she swallowed her first oyster. But, if they are burgled, don't blame me, or ask me to buy the family a new lot; for eight hundred thousand pounds is more than I could spare at the moment."

II

At Muddlehampton Ball on the night of that thirteenth of September on which H.R.H. the Duke of Middlesex "opened" the first wing of the so-long-needed lunatic asylum, the Marchioness of Grandcourt did dance the first quadrille with the Royal Duke, as her husband had foretold must be the case.

Every one stared at the prince, and nearly every one stared at the diamonds: even H.R.H., who knew all about them.

"They look better than usual," he observed to Lady Grandcourt. "They seem brighter than last time I saw them."

His own wife, who was the Mayor's partner, was the daughter of the Grand Duke of Rumpelstilzchen, and had only a few moonstones.

"It's the setting: I determined to polish it. And the detectives would not let my maid do it. So I got a toothbrush and some plate powder and cleaned it up myself. Isn't it a grand success?"

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"Splendid. I wonder they trusted you alone with them."

"The detectives? They didn't. They insisted on remaining in the room; and we all went in procession back to the safe when I had finished. We looked like the lion and the unicorn bringing back the crown in Tenniel's picture in 'Alice in Wonderland.'"

Of course the two detectives were at the ball, and dogged her ladyship's footsteps obviously.

"One of those men," observed Lady Grandcourt to her husband a little later, "isn't a detective a bit. See what nice feet he has! Besides he's good-looking; and he smiles and doesn't pretend not to have been looking when you catch his eye. It's my belief I've seen him before," she added, "but I can't remember where or when."

"Perhaps because you never did, my dear Squeaky."

But when Lady Grandcourt had got an idea into her head, it was much in the habit of sticking there, and she was convinced that, though the face of the handsome detective was not familiar, it was one she had seen before, perhaps only once, but still once, somewhere.

Just as Lord Grandcourt was sinking into blissful unconsciousness, on their return from the ball, about 4 a.m., his noble consort pulled him back to semi-wakefulness.

"Puggy," she said, "I remember!"

"What?"

"I remember where I saw that man—the good-looking detective—before. It was ever so long ago, and only once; but I remember. Aren't I clever? It was at Duckling and Hunt's quite four years ago; he was one of the two clerks who brought me the diamonds when I was going to the first Drawing-Room in 1902. The *old* clerk carried them, but this one was with him and watched me and the old clerk unlock the cases, each with our own key, and watched me put them on. It was four years ago, and I never saw him again, but I remember him. Puggy, isn't it clever of me?"

But the sentence was too long, and the Marquess of Grandcourt was fast asleep. Presently the Marchioness fell asleep too, smiling blandly at certain thoughts of her own, especially at the thought of recollecting a face she

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had seen but once, and then only for a minute or two, the face of a mere bank-clerk who had never addressed a word to her.

III

At a very much earlier hour than was agreeable to that nobleman, the Marquess of Grandcourt was aroused from his slumbers by a request that he would be good enough to allow Mr. Dunn to speak to him: Mr. Dunn was the elder of the two detectives.

"My lord," said he, on being at length admitted, "I thought it right to request to see your lordship. There's no use making a fuss before one *needs* to make a fuss: but does your lordship know anything of Mr. Rebane?"

The Marquess with some difficulty remembered that Mr. Rebane was the junior and handsome detective.

"*I* know anything of Mr. Rebane! Why on earth should I? If any one knows anything of him I should think *you* did. You brought him."

"I, my lord!"

"Why, yes, of course. Didn't Scotland Yard send him with you? Isn't he your colleague, partner, whatever you call it?"

"Dear me, no, my lord. When your lordship wrote to us for a detective, I was detailed; Mr. Rebane joined me at Paddington, as from Messrs. Duckling and Hunt. I understood both the bank and your lordship wished to employ a detective, and that he was the bank's employé and representative. He does not belong to us." There was a brief pause. "And now," my lord, "he seems to have disappeared."

Soon the fact of his disappearance was established—and, alas! also the disappearance of the famous Grandcourt diamonds.

The safe had not been broken open, but the lock had been tampered with and opened. And the jewels were gone.

Both detectives had slept in the same room: that in which the safe was. Mr. Dunn admitted he was not a light sleeper. ("Naturally," murmured Lady Grand-

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court; "that's why you're a detective.") But he was sure he must have been drugged in his sleep, or he would have been awakened by Rebane's moving about and working with false keys at the lock of the safe.

"Perhaps," observed her ladyship, "they were not false keys he used: he may have had the real keys."

"Why? Are yours missing?" asked my Lord.

"Oh, no. But this man is, or used to be (I expect it will turn out the latter) a clerk at Duckling and Hunt's. That may have put the idea into his mind. He certainly saw the diamonds there once, though only for a moment; the safe here has the same lock as the safe there, and he may have had access to the key—though I admit it is most unlikely."

"But," objected the Marquess, "the safes have *two* locks: the one Duckling and Hunt's key opens, and the one ours opens."

Lady Grandcourt laughed.

"I know. Let me now remind you of what happened when we got home last night. I went to my own room for two or three minutes; then you, I, Mr. Dunn, and Mr. Rebane went to the safe. I unlocked it with Messrs. Ducklings and Hunt's key, which they gave me with the diamonds on Monday; you unlocked it with our own key. I took off the diamonds, put them in the safe, and you and I both locked it. But, as we left the room, you dropped your key, and you were so dog-sleepy you did not notice it; but I did. It made no noise, for it is small and light, and fell on the woolly mat at the door. Mr. Rebane picked it up: I saw him in the looking-glass that hangs in the corridor."

"Why didn't you pick it up yourself if you saw me drop it?"

"I thought," said her ladyship, coolly, "it would be more amusing to leave it for Mr. Rebane to pick up. I felt certain from the first he was not a detective, and I felt nearly certain I knew what he had come for."

"So you let him get the diamonds to prove yourself right!" exclaimed her husband, with some pardonable heat.

Lady Grandcourt laughed softly.

"I think," she said, "we had better let it be known

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far and wide the diamonds are gone. They will be safer."

Lord Grandcourt did not pretend to understand her. She got up and moved to the door. Something in her back seemed to say "Come after me," and he did.

In her own boudoir she sat down and laughed heartily.

"And now," she said, "I will condescend to explain: the diamonds that foolish young rascal has gone off with, are not those which you insisted on our removing from the security of the bank, but a very perfect set of copies I had made last week in excellent Parisian paste—you know we have photographs of almost every diamond, as well as of the whole parure. At first they were very unwilling to copy them, and it cost me nearly three hundred pounds. At the ball I wore the real ones, and here the real ones are."

Lady Grandcourt opened a drawer and took out some common paper boxes such as millinery is sent through the post in, and in them, safe and sound, were the Grandcourt diamonds.

"On getting home from the ball I ran up here and changed the real for the false ones; then we went downstairs and we solemnly locked up the shams. I knew the real ones would then be safe enough here."

They both laughed.

"The shams are excellent," observed his lordship.

"Yes. Apart, only an expert would have suspected them; had you seen both together you would have seen the paste parure looked too new."

"And so you cleaned and polished up the old. Clever woman!"

His wife nodded.

"Yes. It was delightful being watched all the while by Mr. Rebane, for whose sake I did it. I suspected him a little from the first. I am sure it will turn out he was sent away by Duckling and Hunt, perhaps quite soon after I saw him there. But, Puggy, let us hold our tongues till Duckling and Hunt have the real diamonds safe again. Certainly no one will come after them now it is believed they are gone."

And this time the Marquess of Grandcourt allowed himself to be guided by his wife's good counsel.

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CHANGED

THE ancient and loyal borough of Devoncourt decided to present its Mayor with a testimonial. He had been Mayor six times, three years in a row each time; and he would have been Mayor seven years successively, but that his first wife was so careless as to die in the October of his third mayoralty.

"It's no use electing him," declared the senior alderman, "with his wife dead under three weeks. How can he entertain? And where's the glory of a Mayor that can't entertain?"

The senior alderman's arguments fell on willing ears; none of the aldermen and none of the town councillors wanted a Mayor that could not entertain. "Why have a Mayor at all else?" And no one could expect a man to give goose-feasts whose late wife's "buryin' cake" was scarcely all eaten up.

So Councillor Buck was not re-elected that ninth of November—Councillor Frant taking his place—very temporarily as it proved, for the new Mayor died himself in the July following, his predecessor now returning to his place as Deputy. Towards the end of September, the Deputy Mayor provided the Corporation with a Deputy-Mayoress (younger, better-off, and better-looking than the original Mrs. Buck, but not destined to be Mrs. Buck for long, as will appear presently). And on the ninth of November he was duly elected Mayor of Devoncourt for the seventh time. During that Mayoralty his present Majesty came to the throne, and also came to open the new Lunatic Asylum at Devoncourt; on which occasion, as above hinted, Mrs. Buck ceased to exist, and Lady Buck walked in her boots. Only she wished to be called Lady Puncher-Buck, Puncher being Sir Benjamin's second name.

T

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And now Sir Benjamin had given a new face to the town clock, and it was desired to present him with something—only no one could think what—an address, of course, illuminated—naturally. But what gift should accompany it? The Vicar suggested a Family Bible; but, as it was pointed out that he had no family, and had a very handsome Bible, the suggestion was overruled.

At last he told them flatly he would like his portrait—in his civic robes, with his new coat of arms painted on the wall behind him. And this was done; and a very fine portrait it was, for the Mayor was a handsome man, and the Guildhall, in the distance, was represented about five times the size of Windsor Castle.

The artist was a Londoner; but he came down to Devoncourt for the presentation and stayed for the subsequent banquet. Next morning he was just sitting on his portmanteau (all night he had dreamt an elephant in pyjamas had been sitting on it) to make it shut, when a timid knock came at his door.

"Come in!" he yelled. And a very big, shy farmer gingerly opened the door; he didn't open it very far, but peeped in cautiously as if he supposed a loose tiger or so to be within.

"Do you want me?" demanded the artist, still hot from the portmanteau.

"Be you thick painter?"

"Which painter?"

"Him as pented Counzillor's po'trait?"

The artist admitted that he was.

"Won'erful vine po'trait, too," observed the farmer.

The artist said he was glad he liked it.

"I should ha' known," declared the farmer, "whose po'trait it were; even if the name hadn't a bin printed underneath."

"That," said the artist, "is praise indeed."

"And now," pursued the farmer, coming further into the room, and peering into the bottom of his hat, as if he expected to find—say an emu, or a dead rabbit in it—"I want to know, if I may make so bold, will you pent a po'trait for *me*?"

"*Your* portrait?"

"No, Sir. No; not *my* po'trait azackly; not quite

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zo bad as *my* po'trait. But, well, sir, it's my vather's po'trait as I were wishful fur to have; and for you to pent, if I may make so bold."

The artist laughed.

"My terms are a bit high," he observed.

"So I 'eered, so I 'eered," declared the farmer hurriedly. "*Cruel*, they was, I heer'd, say."

The artist stopped smiling.

"A hundred guineas," he observed severely.

"A deal of money, as *you* say, just for a po'trait like; but" (desperately) "I've a decent bank o' money, and I *should* like vather's po'trait."

The artist laughed again. The farmer's eagerness was flattering.

"Well," said the limner, "besides the money, your father will have to give me sittings."

"Zittin's! Zittin's of eggs?"

"Eggs, no! I mean he'll have to come up to London to sit to me while I paint the portrait."

"Come up to Lunnon! An' 'owiver can he do that? and he in Devonthorp churchyard this vive year?"

The artist looked as grave as possible.

"But, my good sir, you never mentioned that your father was dead. How can I paint his portrait if he is dead?"

"Well," said the farmer, "I reckon King John's dead; there ain't bin no King Johns in my time (nor yet vather's), and I 'eerd un zay yesterday as you'd pented King John's po'trait beautiful, and a big cart in his hand."

This argument was unanswerable, and the artist did not attempt to answer it.

"Have you got any photograph of your father?" he asked, instead.

"Votergraph? An' if I had vather's votergraph, why *iver* should I want you to pent his po'trait?"

"Was he like yourself?"

"Vather were older than me."

"Indeed! But, allowing for the difference of age, were you and he alike?"

"Middlin'; see, vather were terrible bald. And he had no teeth except those he bought last time he went

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to Exeter Vair, and those he weared only on Zundays, coz he could not bite wi' 'em in his mouth, and mother could'n abear to zee un on the table during meal-times. Otherwise vather and me were powerful like, except of my eyes bein' black and his more grey-like."

The artist seemed discouraged.

"Oh!" called out his new friend. "Uncle Reuben, 'e were reckoned precisely similar to vather, and we'ne got *his* votergraph."

"Any of your father's clothes?"

"Yes! *And* his watch and best chain."

"Well, I'll do what I can. You send me your Uncle Reuben's photograph; and your father's clothes and things, and I'll sketch *you* in now, for the figure. When it's finished you shall come up to my studio in London and look at it . . . It's a peculiar commission; and I'll treat you as fairly as possible—if you don't care about the portrait you needn't pay for it."

"Zurtinly that do be very vair, indeed, sir. But" (more cheerfully), "I'm zure to like un."

"I hope you will. Well, good-bye; and as soon as you send the things up, I'll make a start. Oh, by the way, here's my address. My name you know already. And yours?"

"Zame as vather's—Elijah Blackmore, Zouth Zeal, Zticklepath, near Okey'ampton, Devonshur."

The artist made a note of them, and Mr. Blackmore got himself out, again without opening much of the door, and with a Parthian glance back for the tiger. Three months later he was summoned to town.

"The portrait is finished," wrote the painter, "and I want you to come up and look at it. As I said, you need not buy it if you don't care for it. But, if you do buy it, £105 is the price, and it's the cheapest picture I ever sold; for it gave me more trouble than six ordinary portraits."

Mr. Elijah Blackmore lost no time in betaking himself to London.

On entering the studio he saw a large canvas, veiled with a black cloth, and his artist friend repeated his warning that, if unsatisfactory, Mr. Elijah Blackmore, junr., need not purchase the portrait.

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"All the same I hope you *will* like it. I've thought over this portrait a lot, and it's really a fine portrait; I never painted one with more character; and I fancy it is like you and like your uncle, and like your father too. Anyway," and he switched off the cloth, "there it is."

With undissembled admiration, with filial veneration, did the honest farmer gaze long and silently on the effigy of his departed sire.

Then he dragged from his pocket a bulgy leathern bag, and rapturously told out a hundred and five yellow sovereigns.

"So you *do* like it?" said the flattered artist.

"Like ut! Sir! It's—it's wonderful."

Again Elijah turned to feast his eyes on the parental features.

"And you niver seen un!" he ejaculated. "And you pented un!"

"Well," said the painter modestly, "I had *you* to go by, and his clothes, and your uncle's photograph. I *am* glad you're satisfied."

"Zatisfied! I'm *proud* to buy it, sir. But"—sighing heavily, and gazing still at the canvas—"zo that's vather's likeness now! *'Eavenly Lord, 'ow he do be altered. I should niver* have knowed un. Niver!"

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DR. GOODENOUGH'S WARD

I

DR. GOODENOUGH lived most part of the year alone, but during the midsummer and Christmas holidays he had a companion, who was always known among his acquaintance as Janet Goodenough. Nevertheless it was perfectly well known among them all that Janet was no relation of the doctor's. He had never been married, and Janet was not the child of any brother or cousin: he called her his ward, but her claim even to that description rested on no legal right. He had simply adopted her, and, being ignorant of her own name, had suffered her to bear his own.

Had the doctor not been left a fortune, it is probable that he would have continued in active practice—at all events, until he should have been an old man, but when he was between forty and fifty years of age, a fortune had, in fact, been left him, and that by one who was no kith or kin of his. The bequest had come from a patient, and one so truly alone in the world that after her death there was no one found to come forward and dispute her will. So that the doctor felt that he might accept the good things that had fallen into his lap without scruple or disquiet. Now, the legacy was a large one—not, perhaps, amounting to a large fortune by itself, but considerable enough to make the doctor very independent; for he had not originally been without private means, and he had not been for nearly thirty years in practice without having been able to save something comfortable.

When Dr. Goodenough found that he possessed nearly fourteen hundred pounds a year, he told himself that it behoved him to rest. He was not by habit or inclination a lazy man, but neither was he specially robust, and his

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life had hitherto been toilsome. He had been at work when many of his class are hardly free from the schoolroom, and he had lived his life eagerly from day to day, so that he had, in truth, felt himself tired at an age that was by no means advanced. And, now that fortune had hurried after him and laid her hand upon his shoulder, he had no desire to be lazy, but he thought of such usefulness as would be to him rest.

He lived in great comfort in his neat bachelor home, but his life was not selfish or useless. Many a poor patient was the better for his advice, and he was apt to supplement advice with solid matters more appreciated by the lay intelligence. Yet was he no poacher, spoiling other men's labours because his own cost him nothing. There was not a doctor in the neighbourhood who did not speak well of him, and many a poor doctor owed him gratitude, as well as the poor patients.

Nevertheless was Dr. Goodenough sometimes lonely. He had an old secret (about which no mystery is to be made here), the memory of which kept him single. He had once truly loved, and his love had seemed to be returned; but if the girl he had loved had in truth loved him, then had she sacrificed her love, for him she had not wedded. The man she had married had been of a rank higher than her own, and of means greater than those the doctor had boasted then, but he had been a spendthrift, and indeed a gambler; and the girl who married him in haste had not been without leisurely repentance.

Her memory kept Dr. Goodenough a bachelor all his life; and sometimes the loneliness of his home weighed upon him. In the old days of his hard work this had been less felt, but now that he had greater leisure, he had also more frequent temptation to sad recollection.

How great is the blessing of a warm hearth and a well-provided board, but how desolate a warm hearth and plentiful table can seem when one sits day after day alone.

It must not be imagined that Dr. Goodenough was a melancholy sour man, carping at the goods that had been vouchsafed to him, because one desired good had been withheld. He was nothing of the sort. He was a cheery, contented gentleman, thanking God daily for his unexpected benefits, and finding life a pleasant, worthy

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occupation, only now and then admitting that he felt a little lonely.

He had guessed long ago the answer to life's great riddle of happiness, knowing that it is to be secured most surely by him who is determined to seek it in striving to add to the happiness of others for the love of God.

II

Dr. Goodenough was far from spending all his evenings alone in that neat house of his called "The Elms." He was a notable whist-player, and whist, we know, implies three companions at all events; for whist with a dummy was little more worthy of serious consideration in the estimation of Dr. Goodenough than homœopathy.

Dr. Goodenough belonged to no whist-club. He hated to do things by means of clubs.

"If one can't get up in the morning without belonging to an early rising association," he would declare, "one may as well stop in bed, for all the good one is likely to do when one is up."

But though he belonged to no whist-club, he and certain old friends of his met together for the playing of whist, with as great regularity as could have been secured by any club-rules and regulations. To tell the truth, I believed they liked winter better almost than summer, because of the long, social winter evenings, when they could enjoy a full amount of their favourite pastime after their seven o'clock dinner, and yet be keeping no late hours—a thing they all detested.

On one such evening, a good many years ago, there was a social gathering at the house of the doctor's neighbour, Miss Faddleby, and the doctor himself was, of course, among the guests. For it was in truth a thing of course, since Dr. Goodenough and Mr. Cutley were the only gentlemen Miss Faddleby was on terms of great intimacy with.

Mr. Cutley was a widower, and by profession a barrister, and he was also in what are pleasantly called "easy circumstances." There was a general easiness about the circumstances of the little circle in which Miss Faddleby and Dr. Goodenough moved.

Whoever gave a whist-party, even if there were but

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two tables, these two gentlemen were pretty sure to be invited.

It was the dead season of the year, a few weeks before Christmas, and bitter cold. There had been a cruel east wind all day and, indeed, for several days, and as the short December day closed in, a flake or two of snow had fallen.

"If the wind drops we shall have six inches of snow on the ground before morning," the doctor had said, after greeting his hostess.

"Ay, and it will fall," said Mr. Cutley. "I never knew that black look in the air without snow coming quick on the top of it."

"Thank God, we have warm houses to shelter us," said Miss Faddleby.

The doctor shook his head and gazed, without speaking, rather wistfully, into the fire. He could not but think sadly of the homeless thousands who had neither fire nor abundant food to comfort them. He knew that it would make them no warmer for himself to be cold and hungry; but he could never help feeling ashamed, as it were, of all his own blessings when he remembered those who were not so blest.

"God knows," he would think, "I deserve these things no better than they."

III

It was very cosy in Miss Faddleby's pretty parlour as they sat round the tables playing their social game. It was such a neat room, for the hostess was a traditional old-maid. Everything was good and in good order; the carpet well brushed, the furniture admirably polished, the bits of old china carefully dusted. The fire in the wide grate burned red and clean, the hearth was tidy, and the thick, old-fashioned curtains were drawn close, and there was no dust in their folds. Everything in Miss Faddleby's house had the air of being well treated. And so things that in a scrambling, shiftless household would long ago have looked worn and shabby, were still in their prime there.

Miss Faddleby got more comfort out of her "independence" than many of your careless folks would have

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got out of treble its amount, and had plenty left to spend on others.

The neat and comfortable parlour-maid had reported that it was snowing, and the whistling wind had dropped into silence. There was no sound but the talking of the fire to itself, the complacent purring of Miss Faddleby's sleek cat, and the fragmentary remarks of the whist-players. These last were few and far between, for they "played the game" at these gatherings, and conversation was not indulged in.

About ten o'clock there occurred a strange diversion.

"Please, Dr. Goodenough, if you please, sir," said the old parlour-maid, opening the door, "your housekeeper would like to see you."

It was the last trick, and the doctor held the highest card. What a moment to be interrupted! And never before had such an interruption been known. The ladies looked at one another, and the doctor certainly frowned. But his housekeeper was an old lady of immense discretion, it was quite certain that she would not have come for him had there been no valid reason. Dr. Goodenough played his king, and rose slowly from the table. In the hall he found his housekeeper, a spinster of what are called very hard features, and a somewhat acidulated demeanour, but of great respectability and fidelity. But for her, it was said, the charitable doctor would have nothing left to live upon, and all his plenty would be lavished on unscrupulous sharpers.

"What on earth is it, Hannah?" asked the doctor, drawing the old woman into Miss Faddleby's dining-room. To him she was still Hannah, after a quarter of a century of faithful service; to the rest of the world she was (by brevet) Mrs. Assydropp.

"Well, sir, I don't know as I can say, not exactly for certain, what it is," replied the housekeeper. "It's that uncommon."

"Bless us, what a mystery you're making!" cried the doctor, a bit testily. "Out with it."

"I do wish, sir, you could just step round to the house for a minute," said Mrs. Assydropp.

The doctor seemed much inclined to refuse.

"I really can't take the responsibility on myself. I

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should be glad if you could come," added the old woman.

Now it was not usual for Mrs. Assydropp to shy at responsibility, and the doctor perceived that something uncommon must indeed be agate. So he slipped on his big coat and his hat, and prepared to follow her next door.

The Elms and Miss Faddleby's house were side by side, but both were detached, standing in good large gardens, so that it was a couple of minutes' walk from the door of one to that of the other. The path was covered already with snow, and the Doctor grumbled in his mind at Mrs. Assydropp, as he felt how cold it struck to his feet.

IV

"There," cried the Doctor's housekeeper, "there it is!"

It was a hamper, rather a large hamper, and it contained an animal. Had the animal been dead, or belonging to a different species, Mrs. Assydropp would probably have waited till the Doctor's return to show it to him—had it been a hare, for instance, or a turkey, or even a sucking-pig. But the animal was alive, and it belonged to the highest order of mammals; it was, in fact, a little girl—a little live girl, who was laughing gleefully.

"What's your name?" demanded the housekeeper, rather sternly; but the little girl did not seem to mind her a bit.

"Babel," she said.

And Babel, or Bab for short, she was thenceforth to be called; but, for my part, I think she had been christened Mabel.

"What's your other name?" demanded the housekeeper, rather proud of her success in having elicited so much information.

But either Miss Babel had no other name, or she preferred to keep it to herself. She only gurgled and chuckled in the most irritating fashion in answer to this further query.

"Where do you come from?" inquired Mrs. Assydropp, shifting her ground.

But Bab only clapped her fat little hands, and the

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Doctor observed that the pink tips of her fingers pointed to the ceiling. "From heaven!" he said to himself.

It appeared that, twenty minutes before, Mrs. Assydropp had heard a ring at the front gate, which had a bell of its own; and had gone at once to see what was wanted. But, owing to the front door being bolted, and the path from it to the gate being covered with snow, a short delay had ensued before she reached it. When she did so, there, in the snow, just inside the gate, stood a hamper, duly addressed to Dr. Goodenough. Of course she had brought it in, without any thought of forestalling the doctor's arrival to open it. But hardly had she got it indoors, before a smothered chuckle came from the interior of the hamper, and a noise suggestive of sturdy struggles to get out on the part of the proprietor of the chuckles. Then had Mrs. Assydropp gone for the doctor.

"Goodness!" cried the gentleman. "I declare it is very embarrassing."

Mrs. Assydropp shook her head. In all her born days she had never known no such a thing happen to an elderly single gentleman what lived by hisself in his own detached villa-residence, never.

Dynamite, in her opinion, was a joke to it; for you just sent for the police when it was dynamite, and let it explode in their hands if it wanted to; but a little girl! Well, of course, there was the workhouse. But no one had ever yet gone to the workhouse from The Elms, and Mrs. Assydropp felt it was a bad beginning.

Dr. Goodenough, however, would not hear of the workhouse.

Mr. Cutley tried to chaff the doctor a little, but the ladies were full of awe. Of course, they had all of them seen babies more than once, in the course of their district-visiting, but it was the first time that a baby had been brought as it were into personal relations with themselves in this manner. And then it was all so very romantic—and who so romantic as your regular old-maid? The snowy night, the mysterious summons of the doctor in the middle of his game, it was so very—well, so very like what one had read of in books.

But if the ladies were awe-struck by the little girl she betrayed no symptoms of being in any way abashed by

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them. She crowed and chuckled, and poked her chubby fists at them if they drew near, and made herself most perfectly at home. Beyond her own name she seemed able to say very little, but she had the most discursive smile. It was easy to see that she had already conceived a preference for Miss Faddleby, and that she considered Miss Pinner rather queer. She had no sort of respect for Mr. Cutley, whose only sister had once been engaged to a baronet, but she evidently "cottoned" hugely to Dr. Goodenough. She clutched hold of his thumb in her fat paw, and patted him on the face when he lifted her in his arms; she pulled his bushy eyebrows, which most people who did not know him were apt to think rather terrible, and her whole face was wrinkled with laughter as she rubbed it up against him.

"She certainly ought to be in her bed—that, at any rate, is certain," remarked Miss Faddleby.

"But the question is, where *is* her bed?" observed Mr. Cutley.

"Hannah is getting it ready," replied the doctor, calmly.

"Gracious!" cried Miss Pinner.

"You're never going to keep it?" cried Miss Lavender, as if it had been a tradesman's pattern.

"If he doesn't, I will," declared Miss Faddleby, looking as if she wished he would give her the chance. But the doctor had no notion of giving her that chance. And Bab was soon a settled institution, like Mrs. Assydropp or the doctor's old groom. At first it was suggested that she should be called Hampers for a surname (Mr. Cutley tried to nickname the child "Confusion," because she had called herself Babel), and Miss Faddleby had proposed Snow as an alternative, whereupon Miss Pinner had, with great originality, made a further suggestion of Winter for the surname; but the doctor laughed and said, "My own name is good enough; let that do for her," and Bab, Baby, and Bel Goodenough she speedily became.

V

Even Mr. Cutley had to admit that their old friend had not decreased his happiness by taking the little foundling

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into his home. He seemed, Miss Faddleby declared, to have grown younger, and I really think it was partly true. Before Bab's coming he had been used to think and speak of life as being chiefly—so far as he was concerned—a contented waiting for the grave. But now he had a thousand living interests, and he belonged to his fellow-creatures by a whole chain of new ties.

He had always been a man of warm, large heart, and the little girl was a sort of earthly anchor of his tenderness.

And how cheerful the snug house became! Oddly enough, even Mrs. Assydropp felt it. It is probable that she would not have admitted to any one that she was glad of the child's presence, but she was in truth glad of it, for her old master's sake.

"Ponto's a good dog, I will say," she thought, "and very clean in the house; but he'll be dying soon now, and he hain't got not the same tastes as the master; he's always for fighting when the doctor takes him out, and indoors he do sleep constant. The child'll last longer, and her ways keep the master alive. . . . Now, then, you bad child," she would conclude, "how dare you do that when I told you you mustn't," etc., etc.

Both the doctor and his old housekeeper grew very proud of the little girl's beauty; she was, indeed, very fair (and the beauty he had once admired had been dark), but it was an uncommon brilliant fairness, not mere pinky whiteness. And the child was exquisitely dressed.

Hannah would assure her, as she grew older, that beauty soon fades, hinting that she had herself been a phenomenally lovely child, but Bab would always stoutly deny the possibility of that prehistoric beauty, and toss her own golden head very complacently, as if she counted on a continuance of its charms.

Of course, the doctor spoiled her; and in fulness of time all the old ladies and even Mr. Cutley took to spoiling her also. But her nature was too truly sweet to be much injured by it all, and she grew into girlhood without any fault worse than a certain pretty wilfulness that was more than half pretence. Was it not natural that she, the one young thing among so much that was elderly and colourless, should take and be granted her own pretty way?

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VI

One wintry night, on such a night as that whereon Bab had first come to him, the doctor and the girl were sitting by their warm hearth, and he was reading aloud to her from that book "wherein the master has writ of little Nell," while she industriously stitched at some shirts of his. Outside, the bitter wind was complaining of the chill and naked trees, the sleet was driving before it, and the bare branches of the elms were creaking and straining as they swayed and bent before its rude attack; but in here how snug it was!

"Was it like this the night that I was found?" asked the young girl, as the doctor paused at the close of a chapter.

"Something, but not altogether, it was drier snow, and the wind had dropped. It was a colder night, but not so miserable."

Then once again the old story was told of her arrival.

"Please, sir," said Hannah, opening the door, "some one wants to see you." And the doctor, after some slight inquiry, rose and went out to speak to the stranger.

After five minutes he returned. And Bab saw by his face that something unusual had stirred him.

"I am called to a dying woman," he said; "she is too poor to send for an ordinary doctor. I should like you to put on your boots and come with me."

Never had she been asked to accompany him on such an errand before, but without delay or question she made herself ready, and they set out. The sleet drove in their faces, and the boisterous, bitter wind found its way through all their warm wraps. As they passed the station, a train disappeared into the darkness.

"What a night to start upon a journey," said the girl.

"And all alone," said the doctor, solemnly.

It was a very poor lodging that they were called to, and there was hardly any fire in the broken, rusty grate, nor was there much warmth or comfortable, substantial clothing on the narrow bed. A cheap lamp on the chimney-piece gave out little light, but plentiful smell of oil and smoke.

But at first Bab stood outside on the landing, where

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there was no other light than that of a street-lamp outside. The doctor went in, and was soon busy at the bedside, though it was in truth too late. Out into the cold night the spirit was hastening, and before the dawn would be standing in the great brightness of the Perfect Day.

How long he seemed as the girl waited outside on the squalid staircase! But at last he came and shut the door softly behind him.

"Something told me that I should bring you," he said; "something of the truth flashed into my mind the moment I was called here. Bab," he continued, "there is no time for what is called preparing your mind. You must be ready, without any preparation, to be gentle and loving, and calm too. She is dying fast (the poor lady in there for whom I was sent). And she is a lady, for all this poverty—a lady I once loved very dearly; nay, my love is still as great, though different. And, my child, she knows you."

"Is she my mother?" whispered the girl.

The doctor nodded, and softly opened the door for her to go in. The dying widow raised herself a little, and watched her coming.

"When I gave her to you," she whispered, lifting her pale eyes to the doctor's face, "I had too many. And now all are gone before me along the dark road; they were sickly, and I could do nothing for them. You have saved this one. Her father died the night I took her to your door, and he bade me do it."

The hurrying minutes sped, the night grew more bitter cold, but there was a happy light already shining on the face of the dying woman—some first flushing of that light that fills the city where is need of neither sun nor moon, for the Lamb is the Light thereof. The warmth of His divine pity and compassion was in her willing soul, and the long night was almost past. High above the sobbing of the wintry winds the heavenly harmonies were breaking, the voice of the Beloved was clear within her ears. And so, out into the great radiance that ends this night of ours, she passed. A valley of tears had this brief journey been, and now all tears were wiped away.

"After all," said the doctor, "she is not alone upon her journey."

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THE ABBOT'S TRUST

I

As Waldo Rockstrand reached the foot of what was evidently going to be a long hill, he fell from a long trot into a walk, let the reins fall loose in his hand, and so gave his horse to understand that they might take it easy. Then he thrust his right hand into the breast-pocket of his coat, and drew out a letter, which he proceeded to read, for about the fifth time, not because he liked it, but because it demanded attention. It ran as follows :—

"Fell Court, Tuesday.

"DEAR MR. ROCKSTRAND,

"For some time I have had it on my mind that I ought to speak to you about your engagement to Berta; but I have always found it too difficult. So I think it will be best that I should write. If Berta had been my own daughter, like Phyllis, and, like Phyllis, under one and twenty, I should have felt it my duty to use the whole weight of my authority even to the extent of *forbidding* the engagement altogether. But Berta is of full age, and her own mistress: and a step-mother's attempt to use such authority is liable to be taken in bad part. So I can only appeal to your own generosity and sense of fairness: although I know that I shall displease you, and would displease Berta if she knew what I was doing.

"To yourself personally I have nothing but good-will, and it has always been a satisfaction to me that you and Eddie are friends: when he first brought you to stay with us, I am sure I showed this; I endeavoured to be

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a good hostess, and your friendship with the girls only pleased me, so long as it seemed equally given to them both. It was not until I understood that there was more than friendship between you and Berta that I began to see I had been unwise. If my bearing to you became then less cordial, it was not because I liked you less: and I do not think you ought to blame me if I say frankly that I could not look on complacently and wait for what was plainly going to happen. You are proud, and have a quick temper: you took offence and left us with undisguised resentment. But you did not go without saying to Berta what I hoped you would not say—my coldness came too late.

"After you had gone she told me you had asked her to become engaged to you, and that she had given you no definite reply, but that she intended to write and betroth herself to you. I had, of course, not the real authority of a mother, and though she listened to my advice with all respect, she did not take it. Thus you and she are engaged. From that engagement she, I know well, will never seek to free herself: I do not wish to pretend that she wants to free herself, or that she will want so to free herself. But I cannot help saying that I believe you ought to free her. You have an income, it is true, but it is barely enough for a bachelor with very frugal tastes; and I need not tell you it would be impossible on such an income to support *any* wife, and Berta has not been used to real poverty. My own means are modest enough, but I have been able to give my own two children, and my husband's daughter, a home that is more than merely comfortable: I am a good manager, and stretch my means so as to give them all surroundings suitable to my rank. A poor widow with a handle to her name has many disadvantages, but she has some advantages, and in them Berta has had her share. We see good company, though we *entertain* none, and Berta is not so badly placed as many girls would be in her position.

"You may think that as she has nothing at all, I am not entitled to look for a good income in the man to whom she engages herself. It is not a question of that. If she were rich I would not mind your being poor: she

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would never hear from me any dissuasion from her bestowing her wealth on the man she loved.

"But, Mr. Rockstrand, even romantic young couples must have something to live upon: and what you have would not keep you both. It does not keep you, for you have your art to supply small extras. Some day, perhaps, your art may do more: but when? And how many artists do, in fact, succeed financially?

"In twenty years you may have made a name and be rich: and in twenty years Berta will be past forty! Is she to wait till then?

"Is it fair to let her wait even half that time? She is penniless: but she has more than common beauty: she is, indeed, a lovely girl. And she is well-born and well-bred, accomplished, and in every way attractive. She is not likely to be unsought: I do not say by those whom I would prefer, for I do not mean it—but by such as could afford to disregard her poverty. If you ask me *Is there anyone else?* now, any particular person I have in mind, I answer frankly—No, there is no one. There is, however, no fear of her wearing the willow.

"If years went by, and you yourself found no prospect of being able to take her to such a home as you would yourself think necessary, you would, I know, release her from her engagement. But then it would be very different. She would be no longer quite young: her youth and freshness would have faded, and, besides, the wrench of parting would be far heavier for you both: perhaps most for her. Only a woman knows how terrible it is for a woman to give up the hope she has held for years.

"As it is, your engagement is recent and unknown. The breaking of it would not injure her: and her heart cannot be involved as it would then. She would grieve, but not, I hope, for long; you would grieve, too, but the sense of having acted for her good would salve a wound that could not be deep, as it would be if you were parting from one to whom you had been for years betrothed.

"That, I think, is all that I should say: except, perhaps, that her brother agrees with me. You know how devoted to you he is: he is only a boy, but he has

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a man's strength of affection, and it is all yours. You are, of all men, the one he would choose for his sister's husband. But even he, even so, sees that all we would wish cannot be had for the mere asking.

"Very sincerely, your friend,

"AMABEL BEAUFRONT."

This was Lady Beaufront's letter, and it certainly gave Waldo Rockstrand plenty to think about.

It had been a very unwelcome letter, and the writer was not dear to him. He liked her less than any other member of her family. But though he would, willingly enough, have found fault with her letter, there was not much fault that he could find with it. It was neither unreasonable nor unjust: he could scarcely accuse it even of being cold, it was not heartless, and, if tinged with some salt of worldly prudence, it was not flagrantly worldly. Perhaps Waldo chiefly disliked it—apart from his main ground of dislike, which was, of course, the purport of the letter—because he felt that it was too clever. If Lady Beaufront had written more fiercely he would not have felt so fierce. But she was too shrewd for that: she would not allow him any such advantage as he would have gained had she been rude or savage. She alluded to his poverty, but was careful to say that it was her only objection to him, and she alluded to it with all courtesy: not disguising that, poor as he was, he was richer than her step-daughter, making, in fact, a point of that also.

There was a short postscript, and that he read again, too:—

"Do, please, understand," she said, "how hard it is for a poor woman to write such a letter as this to a friend, as I hope I may always count you. I have read through what I have written, and it sounds stiffer, colder than I would wish it to be. I know you are in every way Berta's *equal;* if she is well-born, so are you. May an old woman say that if she is a lovely girl, you are a very handsome man? As to the wretched money, what there is, is all on your side. There's the rub! If only it were enough to keep you both."

The hill was long, and Waldo had plenty of time to

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read over the letter and postscript, and think over them, too.

It was nearly seven o'clock on a mid-March evening, and indoors it would be already almost dark. Out here there was light enough to see the desolate landscape: all afternoon there had been chilly showers, alternating with gaps of cold sunshine. The rain had stopped now, and the clouds had gathered down into the west, where they lay piled in pale yellowish heaps. Behind him was a flat country, across which the road trailed like a gray ribbon, straight between hedgeless dykes. But he was leaving the flat lands, and as he mounted the ridge there began to be signs that it was the advance-guard of a strangely different country, hills and almost rocks.

His present purpose, however, was not to go much beyond the summit of the ridge. What the country beyond should be like he might see later on; to-night he intended to sleep at a certain inn, of which he had heard from a brother-artist, whither indeed he had written to order rooms.

A quarter of an hour after gaining the top of the hill he came to the inn, and it more than justified the description Jack Earle had given of it. It stood back from the road behind a smooth, flat lawn of about half an acre, on each side of which was an ancient stone gateway, and even in the now very dim light Waldo could see that such a house had never been built for a tavern. It could not be less than four hundred years old, the architecture being that of the end of Henry VII.'s reign, and, though not very large, was as big as many a small squire's manor-house: it was, at all events, double the size of Fell Court, which Lady Beaufront always spoke of as a "country-house."

In the thickening dusk Waldo could hardly see that the place showed signs of some recent neglect. In front of the porched door was a semi-lunar flight of stone steps, and there Waldo dismounted: the door itself stood open, and a broad patch of light shone out through it, falling full on the sign which stood on the lawn, held up on sturdy oaken posts. At the top, in faded gilt letters, was the inscription, "GRANGE INN"; and under the lettering was a coat of arms—a silver crozier upright on

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a blue field, and on each side of it a lean silver lion rampant. At the moment of Waldo's arrival the landlord was coming to look out at the door, and he came down the steps.

"Mr. Rockstrand?" he inquired.

"Yes. I did not make a mistake, then. They told me at Swaleham that the Grange Inn was the first house I should see on my left—but really this looked so little like a public-house that I began to fear I had made a mistake."

"Grange Inn is *not* a public-house, sir," the landlord observed, with mild protest. "But this *is* the Grange Inn. Hi! Root! Come and take the gentleman's horse."

And a lame ostler came shambling up from a paved path leading to the now dilapidated stables.

"Your rooms are ready, sir, and good fires in them," said the landlord, leading the way indoors. "It's chilly weather, and our rooms are big. This way, sir."

The hall was large, anyway, and the staircase broad and handsome, with balustrades of solid oak, carved finely, though not elaborately. At the top was a wide corridor, dimly lighted by a lamp that utterly failed to illuminate it effectually.

Waldo's sitting-room and bedroom were, as the man said, big: and both were panelled, both having handsome chimney-pieces of very dark oak. Over that in the sitting-room was the same coat of arms as the sign displayed, in raised stucco work, painted and gilded, with a motto underneath, "*Expecta Dominum.*" On one wall hung a portrait nearly as old as the room itself.

"You said, sir, in your letter you should arrive about seven, and it's only just seven now. Your dinner will be ready at half-past. Shall I unpack your valise?"

"Oh no, thanks. I can very easily do it for myself. What an interesting house! And what fine rooms!"

"These are not our very best. The big saloon is our best: but it is too big for comfort, so I thought you'd like this better, sir."

"Yes, certainly. This is big enough for me in all conscience."

It was easy to see that the landlord was proud of the house, and pleased by Waldo's appreciation of it. He

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was a thinnish, elderly person, with a defeated air, as if life had been too much for him; even his pride was weak and discouraged.

When Waldo's dinner arrived it proved simple, but quite good—an excellent bit of fish, a juicy, well-cooked steak, and some stewed fruit with thick cream.

The landlord waited on his guest himself, and apologised for doing so.

"There's no waiter, sir. The custom doesn't allow it. I had one when I came first, but there was never anybody for him to wait on, and I had to send him away—he'd have gone melancholy-mad, else. In old coach-days this house held its head high: the railroads ruined it. When I came, I fancied the motoring might set us up: but Brailham's only seven miles further on, and seven miles is only quarter of an hour in a motor. None of them stops here. I see them go by, and it's worse than if they never came nigh us. The local trade is just beer, and the beer scarcely pays rent and upkeep. *I've* tried it, and I'm the last as will try. There's been a landlord of Grange Inn for nigh on three centuries, and James Pecker'll be the last. 'Keep your Pecker up' is a good proverb, but Pecker won't stay up over this door many months longer, and after that there'll be no name there."

"So you're going."

"Yes, sir, at Lady Day. And I shall be out of pocket keeping it till then. I wish it were Christmas."

"And no one's taking it on then?"

"No, sir; the house, they tell me, is going to America."

"The house going to America!"

"Yes, sir. That's the gap. You see, there's not much land—less than a hundred acres. And cold, cross land it is. Shallow—you know: all rock under, and just a skim o' soil atop—as the rain washes off in winter, and the wind blows away (in a manner of speaking) in dry summers. It's all in my hands, and, such as it is, I've got to farm it. Farm it, indeed! I'd as lief farm a brick-yard. Five shillin' an acre's all they dare to ask for it, and that'll show you. And two and six would be half a crown too dear."

"But how does that help the house to go to America?"

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"Well, sir, I'll tell you. There's only this house and the bit of worthless land, and the ruins of the abbey—not much of them either. And the owner knows no one will take on the inn after me. *He* bought it on spec., just as I took it on spec., and he can't get what he looked for out of it. He bought it on mortgage, too, I'm thinking. That's what makes him so eager. He's only a builder himself—and half the ruins he's carted away, to build with in Brailham. There's not much left for him to cart: so he can't look to make much more out of it *that* way. So he's selling, and they say a Yankee is the only bidder: and that he wants to pull the house down and ship it over to America to set up again in New York—for the sake of the panelling, and carved chimney-pieces and that."

"What a shame!" cried Waldo, angrily. "If this sort of thing goes on every old house in England will be sea-sick soon."

"That's what I say," said the landlord, who had never said anything at all like it. "The Government should buy it. What's five thousand pounds to Government? Why, the Preemyer could buy it with half a year's salary, and give it to his lady for a week-end Pye-de-tier. That's all for dinner, sir. Shall you be wanting anything to pass the evening with?"

"Look here! You can bring me something in half an hour—or, say, an hour, and I'll give you a goodish cigar to smoke: and we'll have out our talk. I've a letter to write; but, if you'll come back then, we can chat a bit."

II

When Waldo was left alone he took out Lady Beaufront's letter again, and liked it as little as ever: but he answered it, and his answer was what the lady had hoped it would be. If not specially sweet, it was short enough.

"Dear Lady Beaufront,

"I am writing to Berta in the sense you indicate. With love to Eddie,

"Yours truly,

"Waldo Rockstrand."

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It certainly was not over-civil: to answer a lady's long letter in two curt lines must seem hardly courteous. But Waldo did not want to please Lady Beaufront: she had appealed to his justice and fairness, and he had resolved to do the just and fair thing she had put upon his conscience; but he would not pretend to be friendly, nor would he write as though he saw things with her eyes.

She understood it all very well: she had gained her point, and had to make the best of it. She knew that Waldo would not accept her offer of continued friendship. She sighed—half with relief because she had achieved her purpose, half with regret; for she liked him. Had he asked *her* instead of Alberta, I doubt if she would have refused him, though he had only a little over two hundred a year. Prudent as she was for her step-daughter, she had not been specially prudent on her own account. She had married twice, and neither husband had been rich; but they had both been, like Waldo, handsome men.

Colonel Beaufront had nothing but his pay, and, though he died a K.C.B., he died leaving her only the five thousand pounds for which he had insured his life. Captain Thorpe lived just long enough to attain flag-rank, and so she had the pension of an Admiral's widow, and he had also been able to leave her some two or three hundred a year. Her whole income was under seven hundred, and she had three children to bring up. She was now over forty, and Waldo was not thirty, but I think she would have said "Yes" had he asked her for her very pretty hand.

In one thing, specially, she had been dishonest in her letter to him: she had assured him "there was no one else": but there was some one else, a certain Sir Alured Heythorne, who was by no means a declared suitor of Alberta's, but whom she regarded as a very possible suitor. He was not exactly good-looking, and she liked him far less than Waldo; he had, however, a large income, there was nothing amiss with his character—what there was of it—and he both was, and looked like, a gentleman.

To Berta also Waldo wrote, and at much greater

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length: to her his letter was very gentle, and very tender; nevertheless, it did convey what he had told her step-mother it should convey. We had no scruple in reading Lady Beaufront's letter or Waldo's reply: but we will not read his letter to Berta nor her answer to it.

"All the same, I shall marry her if I can," he said to himself as he sealed it.

"I shall marry him or no one," she assured herself, as she wrote consenting to the ending of their brief engagement.

Meanwhile, Waldo, when he had written his two letters, sat down by the fire and looked up at the escutcheon over the chimney-piece. The sealed letters on the table behind him bore the same arms—azure, two lioncels rampant argent: only there was no crozier between the two lions. Then he turned in his chair and studied the ancient portrait. If there had been a looking-glass in the room he would have studied that also, though he was a man little given to admiring his own beauty.

Presently the landlord returned and meekly set down certain old-fashioned decanters on the table. The two letters lay face downwards close to his hand, and he could not help noticing the big seals.

"I'm sure I beg pardon if it's a liberty, sir," he observed, with a glance at the chimney-piece, "but your crest seems like that yonder, barring the pastoral-staff or whatever they call the thing."

"Yes; they are the same," said Waldo, quietly. "I know all about that. Did anything in my name strike you?"

"Well, no, sir; I dare say it would be an uncommon name, but there are Rockstrands in this parish—poor labouring folk, nothing at all to do with the likes of you. So the name did not strike me—not anyways particular."

"Are any of them like that portrait?"

"Like that portrait? Not a bit, sir. But, lord bless me, now you name it, sir! Why, it's wonderful like yourself, sir."

"So I noticed. You know who it is?"

"I never heard the name. It's a fixture, like the chimney-piece and the panelling and that. They say it's the photo of the last Abbot of Burgage Abbey—the ruins,

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as we call them. But I never heard what the Rev. Gent's name were."

"It was Rockstrand," said Waldo, handing a cigar to mine host. "Sit down and I'll tell you. Burgage Abbey was not very old at the time of the Reformation, when all the abbeys were dissolved. It was founded at the end of the Wars of the Roses—the monks were to pray for the souls of certain folk killed in those wars."

"I've heard something of that; and this house was the Abbot's Grange—so they tell me."

"Yes. I guessed as much. I know a bit about those sort of matters. It's my hobby. But I've never been down in this part of the world before, and I come by a kind of accident, because a friend of mine, Mr. Earle, was here last summer, and recommended the place to me."

"I remember him well. He stayed a month, and a lively guest he was."

"So he is. He merely mentioned the Grange Inn, near Brailham. I had no idea it was close to Burgage Abbey—*that* name would have interested me much more. The last Abbot of Burgage was brother to the last squire of Rockstrand—is there any squire of Rockstrand now?"

"No, sir. There's a very small farm-house, scarce more than a cottage, called Rockstrand, on this land. Stay now! I've heard tell that there *was* a bigger house and it was burned down, and never built up——"

"Well, well! There was a squire Rockstrand of Rockstrand once, and the last squire was brother of the last Abbot of Burgage. The last squire was my direct ancestor—so yonder portrait is that of my great-great-twenty greats-grand uncle, so to speak!"

"Well, sir! May I never!" cried the landlord.

"Could I buy the portrait?" asked Waldo.

"Buy it? Well, no, sir. I fancy not, unless you bought house and land and all."

"You said, I think, five thousand pounds was what the Yankee gentleman was bidding."

"So I did, sir. But it might be guineas. I would not like to mislead you."

"Well, guineas. And who did you say was the owner?"

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"Timms his name is. Obadiah Timms—a builder in a small, paltry way at Brailham. He lives in Cave Villa, a mile this side Brailham. He christened it himself. He's a sort o' ranter preacher o' Sundays, and he named his cottage after the prophet, not as you could hide prophets in it: let 'em be ever so little."

"I'll do it," said Waldo. But he did not say so aloud. He had made a mental calculation: he had two hundred and forty pounds a year that came from Consols: if he sold out and bought this property he would have over four thousand pounds left.

"If the worst comes to the worst," he thought, "it's odd if I can't get back a bit of my five thousand by selling some of this carved oak—not that I would, if I could help it."

When the landlord was gone, Waldo went to bed, and he dreamt of three people: of Berta, and her stepmother, and of the last Abbot of Burgage. Alberta assured him that if he did not marry her she would marry no one else; Lady Beaufront was having a bad quarter of an hour: for the Abbot was standing over her with his crozier in his hand, and a silver lion, on its hind-legs, smiling sarcastically on each side of him. But to Waldo the Abbot was uncommonly friendly.

"Do it," said his Lordship. "Do it, and you'll never regret it. *I'm* your trustee, and I've kept my trust a long while. Don't let your chance slip."

III

Next morning Waldo walked over to Brailham, and arrived at Cave Villa early enough to find Mr. Obadiah Timms at home.

"Yes. I'm Mr. Timms," he admitted, "and most days I'd have been at the yard before now. But I'm suffering from sciatica, and these foreign complaints don't give English folk no chanst. My left leg feels as if it had a toothache in it."

Mr. Timms admitted that he wished to "realise" the Burgage property.

"Our people thinks," he confessed, "as I'd no call to go meddlin' with old papist abbeys, and little good

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they've done me. A Mr. Eleazar Q. Pudgecock bids me five thousand."

"Pounds," suggested Waldo. "Not shillings."

Obadiah closed his eyes and protested.

"Both. Pounds *and* shillings. Guineas, as you might say, sir."

"Oh, guineas. Well, I'll give you five thousand one hundred guineas, and pay you the money in a fortnight. You would not get it from America under a month or two."

"It includes," remarked Obadiah, "the Lordship of the Manor and all manorial rights. Say five thousand five hundred."

"The American gentleman would get them for five thousand."

"Ah! but he can't take them to America. They don't count in his case, not the manorial rights don't. In America there aren't no Lords of the Manor."

"All right. Let him have it all for five thousand guineas. Good morning, Mr. Simms. I hope the tooth-ache in your leg will soon be better."

"Timms, sir, Timms."

But Mr. Timms did not want to say good morning. He knew well that the American bid was not guineas, but pounds—25,000 dollars. And five thousand shillings made all the difference to Mr. Timms.

"Good morning," said Waldo, firmly. "Is the old church here worth seeing? Now I'm here I'll look at it."

"Not a bit worth seeing, sir. Our Bethesda *is*. But, sir, say five thousand two hundred and fifty."

"Pounds?"

"Guineas, of course. We was talking in guineas."

"I'm tired of talking. I'll give you five thousand two hundred and fifty pounds for land, and manor-rights and all. Or else I'll go and see the old church, and keep my money."

Mr. Timms could not bear to part with him; and for five thousand two hundred and fifty pounds he at last agreed to sell the Burgage Manor Estate and all its "appurtenances."

Within a month Waldo was Lord of the Manor of Burgage, and had something over four thousand pounds of capital left to him. He stayed on at the Grange Inn

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and enjoyed the sensation that he was, in fact, living in his own house.

Mr. Pecker was much interested, and felt a respect for his new landlord that he had never thought necessary in the case of Mr. Timms. He was very glad to have his landlord as his lodger, and suggested very reasonable terms for a protracted stay: so Waldo gave up his rooms in London, sent for his belongings, and settled himself down in his own house.

"To think," Mr. Pecker observed, with a glance at the portrait of Abbot Rockstrand, "that your great-uncle should belong to you, sir, and six weeks ago you'd never seen him."

"It's a good picture, too," Waldo remarked, "and a good artist painted it. . . . I'm glad I bought the place in time to save the rest of the ruins."

He often went to the ruins, and even what was left was enough to suggest a picture, which he was resolved to paint. One arch remained, and almost all of the south transept, in the wall of which was a beautiful window: from this transept a short passage ran to what had been the sacristy, and thence a cloister had connected the church with the abbey proper, of which nearly all the walls were gone, and all the doorways and window mullions: but the ground plan might, to a great extent, still be picked out by a man with some slight knowledge of architecture and archæology.

By moonlight the transept looked very beautiful, as it did, too, when, by day, the blue sky of spring and the budded-elms showed through the tracery of the one perfect window. Waldo determined to make two pictures, one from outside, a little later on, perhaps, when the trees that grew where the nave and choir had once met should have their first delicate leaves; one at once—the moonlight-scene which he meant to paint from within the transept itself. The drawing he could do by daylight, but for the colouring he had often to go to the ruins by night, to get it right, and note carefully what would really show then, and what would be lost in black shadow.

His visits to the abbey, therefore, attracted no attention; and there was nothing in them to surprise Mr. Pecker's curiosity.

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As the moon aged it rose later, and Waldo's visits became later, for he wished always to see it risen to the same height, shining through the tracery of the transept window. One night he had been standing still for a good many minutes, noting carefully the effects of light and shadow, and making mental notes, too, of colours he should use. An owl hooted, and he listened with pleasure, for the sound suited the place, and his own ideas of the *feeling* of the picture he wanted to make. There was no other sound, for the night was still and fair; often there had been the soft patter of rain, or the bluster of bleak April winds. The owl did not scream again, and Waldo was about to turn homeward when he distinctly saw a tall white figure pass across a patch of bright moonlight, from one black shadow to another. The figure moved rather quickly, but was plainly visible for several seconds; it was a man's, and tall, a little taller than Waldo was himself, strongly built, too, like himself, but clad in an ample white cowl, the hood of which was drawn forward on to the head. A thick cord, dark but not black, hung about the neck, hidden behind by the hood of the cowl, and from it, on the monk's breast, was suspended a gold cross, set with five jewels that caught the moonlight.

At the moment when the figure passed out of sight, in the direction of the old sacristy, it turned, and Waldo plainly saw the face. It was not unlike his own, but that of a man twice his age, with a gray beard: it was the face of Abbot Rockstrand, but older-looking than the portrait. As he turned the Abbot smiled, and his smile was kindly and paternal.

Waldo was, as well he might be, utterly astounded: but there was nothing in the apparition sinister or terrifying, for the old monk's face was full of benevolent encouragement.

"Well I'm ——" "blowed" Waldo meant: but the expression seemed slightly flippant, and would probably be an anachronism: and he suppressed it. For several seconds he stood staring into the dark corner where the figure had passed out of sight: but it did not come back, nor, on that occasion, did Waldo go after it. Neither, when he got home, did he speak of what he had seen, but contented himself with a long and close study of the

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Abbot's portrait. It was a fine face, strong and manly, a face one could trust, and there lay on it no shadow of tragedy: for the picture was painted ten years before the Defender of the Faith, Henry VIII., had caused the monk to be hanged, drawn and quartered for the new crime of not accepting the King as Pope. Abbot Rockstrand, one could see, had been a gentleman, and a man of firm opinion, and upright behaviour. In spite of the pleasant gleam in the clear blue-gray eyes, and the smile that lurked about the large, strong mouth, one could more easily think of his being a martyr than of his being a turn-coat.

"What does he want?" Waldo asked himself. "Such a man should rest in peace."

Look long enough at a well-painted portrait, and eyes or mouth will surely seem to move, and so was it now. The fire-light flickered, and, as Waldo stared at the pictured face, the lips did seem to curve into a fuller smile, and the honest eyes to speak of some purpose unfulfilled but unforgotten.

Presently Waldo moved away, and stood looking down, thoughtfully, into the cheerful glow of the fire: then, lifting his glance, it fell on the arms above the chimney, his own arms, with the added crozier: Abbot Rockstrand's. And, for the hundredth time, he read the motto under them—

EXPECTA DOMINUM.

Waldo knew well whence the words came, and what went with them. "Wait thou on the Lord, and play the man, comfort thine heart, and wait on Him."

Abbot Rockstrand had waited, and had played the man; then came the iteration, "and wait on Him." What for, now? Simply for a promise unfulfilled, and a duty forced into abeyance by imperious death itself.

IV

On the night following Waldo went at the same hour to the abbey: though the moon did not rise so soon. And he stood, where he had stood before, waiting—for what? He did not know. In bug-a-boo ghost-tales, of chains

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that clanked for nothing, and skeletons that rattled their superannuated bones only to *frissoner* the public, he did not believe at all. But his philosophy might reach no farther than Horatio's, and he remembered Hamlet's warning. That the Abbot would come again he felt quite sure, and of his coming Waldo had no fear. He waited, not in dread, but with a strange and tense excitement. In life Abbot Rockstrand had known well what he meant; he must mean something now.

And he came, as he came before: not hurriedly, nor with indecisive step, but with a sturdy, purposeful step, and walked into the darkness that had swallowed him last night. This time Waldo followed, and groped his way into the old sacristy, and from it into the ruined cloister beyond: here it was not dark, the broad moon that had now arisen sent down a clean silver radiance, and in it Waldo saw the Abbot's figure, not moving forward, but standing, as if waiting. At first his back was turned, but, as the young man went forward, the monk faced about, pointing downward with a finger on which a jewel gleamed ruddy in the chill light of the moon. Again he smiled: and, without moving, vanished: and Waldo never saw him again.

It was in broad day that Waldo came next to the place again—a place grass-grown now, over which many pious feet had once passed to prayer. Under the thick turf, Waldo, digging, found the old tiled pavement of the cloister—and it pleased him to think these lovely tiles were his own. Faded as they all were, and cracked as most were, the design was good and noble. Beneath them he came upon a long flag-stone, incised with his own motto, "Expecta Dominum," and that, too, he got up, half dreading that under it he would find the martyred body of him who, on the scaffold in Brailham Market Place, had died professing his loyalty to the king and the king's King. But he came upon no coffin, only upon an iron box, not large or very heavy, and this, when he had filled the hole in again, he took home. There he opened it, and found, wrapped close in many folds of cere-cloth, a parchment and a parcel. The parchment was still legible, and ran somewhat thus: "To me, Robert Rockstrand, by the Divine Mercy Abbot of Burgage, my

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brother, Roger Rockstrand, late of Rockstrand here, and now with God, brought in these evil days the great treasure of our House, to whit the fair large ruby-stone, called the Dove's Egg, that Henry V. gave to our forefather, Sir Roger Rockstrand, at his Knighting on the field of Agincourt, for that the said Roger had saved the King's life. And now the evil threats me sore myself, and I lay the stone here, in the house of St. Bernard, our father, and in his keeping, till good days come again. My nephew is a fearful babe, and him I tell not: but two of our brethren I have told, that, should aught mischance me, they may know. . . ."

Then followed the names of those two monks, who had, as Waldo knew, suffered in the same place as their Abbot not many days after him.

In the packet was the stone, a ruby of the shape and size of a pigeon's egg, and of that rare colour known as "pigeon's blood."

. . . . . .

In equity, Waldo felt himself entitled to the possession of the gem, for he was Roger Rockstrand's lineal descendant, and sole heir-male. Nevertheless, he established his claim at law, both in quality of heir, and as Lord of the Manor. The ruby itself he sold to a foreign potentate, among whose crown-jewels were the finest rubies in the world: as the Dove's Egg was far finer than any of them, His Majesty was not willing that it should belong to any one else.

Burgage Abbey was rebuilt, and Waldo resolved to give it, with an endowment sufficient for the maintenance of an abbot and forty religious, to the order to which it had originally belonged. For this purpose he sought out the General of the Order, with whom he soon formed a strong friendship: and that friendship led to Waldo's own conversion to the ancient faith of his house.

But even his conversion could not now be urged by Lady Beaufront as sufficient obstacle to his betrothal with her step-daughter.

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BLACKFRIARS COURT

OR, THE CURSE OF BRACE

"WHY," asked a small boy, with big eyes, of his nurse, "why is our house called Blackfriars? Tom says it's the name of a bridge in London."

Tom was one of the stable-helpers and a Cockney: Mrs. Bliss was Chalkshire born and bred, and knew as much as she cared about London, and that was very little.

"Sir John don't wish you, Master Robin, to talk so much with the grooms and that," observed Mrs. Bliss, severely.

"Tom isn't a groom," argued Robin, "he's a helper. Is Blackfriars a bridge in London?"

For all Mrs. Bliss knew it might be. So she replied, as it were, sarcastically.

"If Tom says so, that settles it! I'm a moon-raker myself: and don't trouble my head about London bridges."

Robin did not ask what a moon-raker was, because he knew already: he was quite a small boy, but he also was Chalkshire-bred, and was aware that Chalkshire country-folk are called moon-rakers. And every Chalkshire person knows why.

"Well," he demanded instead, "is this house called after the bridge in London?"

"Not likely!" said Mrs. Bliss, scornfully, "if there *is* any such bridge it's called after us, depend upon it: not us after it."

Mrs. Bliss had never lived anywhere further from Blackfriars Court than Domnix village, two miles away, and identified herself with her master's house, so to speak.

"And you don't know," persisted Master Robin,

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rather craftily, "why this is called Blackfriars, any more than you know why the bridge is?"

"But I do, though. It's not pretty, Master Robin, to tell folks they don't know things what they've known all their lives."

Mrs. Bliss got up and poked the fire, and sat down again, remarking it would turn to frost—the fire burned so clear. She then fetched some socks that "wanted" mending, and threaded a darning-needle with brown worsted: observing that the days were not grown much longer, though it was February—in which month, she added, her sister, Mrs. Pim, of the north lodge, was married.

"And a dull sloppy month for a wedding," says I.

"*You* weren't married in February, Blissy, I suppose?" suggested Robin.

"I wasn't married in any month from January to December," Mrs. Bliss explained. "I wouldn't be bothered getting married."

"But you're not *Miss* Bliss, are you?"

She was not going to say that she *was*: so she remarked with dignity that it was a title—"'Twas Sir John's wishes I should be called Mrs. Bliss out of respect," she concluded, with an air of making the matter so clear that Robin felt obliged to think it so.

His real name was John, but Lady Brace said there really couldn't be two Johns (that was why the second footman was known as Frederick, though *he* was John, too), so she called her son Little John, and thence it was an easy step to Robin Hood, and so to Robin for short.

"So," the little boy remarked after staring for some time into the fire, "you *do* know why this house is called Blackfriars."

"Naturally," said Bliss, as if to imply that there was not much, that *could* be known, of which she was ignorant.

"And why is it?"

"Well, it's an old ancient story: and I'm not rightly sure it's a *pretty* story for those whose next birthday'll only make 'em ten."

"I'll ask Tom," said Robin.

"*He* couldn't tell you, if you did . . ." Bliss declared, warmly.

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"Podgers could."

Podgers was the butler, and had been "in the family" five years longer than Bliss: so she was jealous of him. They were both of them Chalkshire, and did not like those who were not, but between themselves they were jealous in a respectable, intimate sort of way.

"Mr. Podgers," observed Bliss, "don't tell a tale well—not to do justice to it. To hear him tell how the West Gable was burnt down you'd think it was nothing: no more than a pig-sty. This house is called Blackfriars Court because it belongs to Court gentry: your papa is Master of the Beagles to Her Majesty: Sir Lionel, the first baronet, was Master of the Beagles to King Charles II., and all the owners of this house have been the same ever since."

"Then it wasn't a Court before King Charles II.'s time?"

"No. It was called Blackfriars Priory once: so they say. A priory is where monks live; and they used to live here."

"Black ones?"

"Not niggers, Master Robin: at least, I've never heard tell they were. P'raps they were foreign, though. Very likely, for they thought more of the Pope than of the King of England: that was King Henry VIII., whose photo is in the saloon. . . ."

"With little legs, and peepy eyes?"

"Yes. And the Pope and him could not get on at all. The Pope was an old bachelor, and His Majesty was quite the contrary: and they argued a deal about that. Besides, the Pope wanted to have it all his own way, and King Henry wouldn't put up with that?"

"What about?"

"Oh, all sorts of things . . . the Pope was a foreigner, and wanted to have church in Latin, and the King liked to have it in English, so's he could join in the hymns and that. And so King Henry passed the Church of England in Parliament, and, of course, all the gentry belonged to it. But the monks wouldn't, and the King said they'd better, or he'd know the reason why."

"Wouldn't they tell him the reason why?"

"Don't interrupt a body, Master Robin; it's not

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manners. These monks here wouldn't join the Church of England, not if it was ever so. And when the King sent them an oath to take they said they'd see him further first."

"But oaths are wicked: you said so when I told you what Gabriel Martin, the gipsy, said to his donkey."

"Very right. But the King didn't want anything of that sort—no bad language: only they were to swear they would belong to the Church of England, and say, 'good-bye and good luck to you' to the Pope: and they wouldn't. So the King said they must take the oath or . . . ."

"Or what?"

"Or be hanged."

"That was swearing, too."

"No, it wasn't. He meant it. They were to be *hung* on a gallows."

"But they hadn't murdered anybody."

"No: no one in particular. It seems hard, p'raps, but the law was that way—and they *were* hanged. Twelve of them. The prior (that was the head monk) and eleven others—in Domnix village, where the may-pole stood when I was a little gell. The youngest was only nineteen and his mother saw it, and she called a curse down . . . he was her only son, and she was a widow: but she didn't mind him being a monk, for he lived close to, in the priory, and she could see him whenever she liked. And she was a poor body, and the old monks were good enough, they say, to poor folk. Anyway, she called a curse down. . . ."

"What did she say?"

"I don't think I'd better tell you. You only wanted to know why this house is called Blackfriars, and I've told you. It's half-past four, and tea-time."

"I'll ask Podgers," said Robin, calmly.

"Mr. Podgers'll know better than tell you. Just you go and wash your hands for tea now."

And Mrs. Bliss began to prepare the tea-things. Whether she conferred in private with the butler I cannot say, but Podgers, on being appealed to, professed entire ignorance as to the curse.

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"Which is what I don't hold with," he declared, severely, "curses being what I've never been used to."

But the reader may have already perceived that Robin was a child of considerable persistence: when he wanted to know something he would not rest till he had found out.

At dessert one night, a week or so after his talk with Mrs. Bliss, his father asked him whether he would rather have an apple or a fig.

"I'd rather know about the widow's curse," Robin replied, very promptly.

Sir John and Lady Brace exchanged a hurried glance, and they both looked annoyed.

"What do *you* know about the widow's curse?" inquired his father.

"I don't know anything: I want to. I asked Blissy, and she would not tell me."

"Blissy was quite right. I don't want to tell you either."

Lady Brace said, "Come here, Robin," and the small child went round to her.

"Bobbins," she said, quietly, "your daddy has a special reason for not wishing you to hear yet about the widow's curse. Promise not to try and find out."

"I promise."

And he kept his word: it was not for a long while after that he did find out, and then it was by accident. But he asked other questions, not that night, but soon, and Lady Brace answered them.

"No," she said, "this house is not called after Blackfriars Bridge, nor is Blackfriars Bridge called after this place: but both are named after the Dominican friars, who were called Black because out of doors they wore black hoods or capes. They had a monastery or friary in London near where the bridge is, and one here. The village is called after their founder, St. Dominic, and it was really Dominick's or St. Dominick's; Domnix is only a corruption of the old name. *Now*, are you satisfied?"

"Did the old friars sell this place to our family?"

"No, Bobbins, I'm afraid not. King Henry confiscated it. . . ."

"Saunders said he suspected a two-legged blackbird

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had confiscated the peaches on the south wall. Confiscate means taking what isn't yours ? "

Lady Brace laughed.

" I hope you weren't the *two-legged blackbird ?* "

" No. Saunders thought it was—but you don't want me to tell tales ? "

" Not at all."

" Well, King Henry took the friars' place, and did we buy it ? "

" No, he gave it to Sir Harry Brace, who belonged to his household and was his godson."

" Like Uncle Roland gave me my silver cup and fork and spoon."

" *Pre*-cisely. And *now* are you satisfied ? "

" But, Mums, can people give away things they've taken ? "

" I thought that was coming ! Of course they can't : and for my part I'm glad it was Sir Harry and not your father to whom this place was given. But, Bobbins, it's right to tell you that, according to the law—a very cruel law I think it was—the friars were guilty of high treason, and so their property was forfeited to the King. Mind you, I do not like Henry VIII. ; I am sure he was a bad and cruel man. But that's not *our* fault now. . . ."

Though Lady Brace had laughed once or twice, the subject was a sore one with her, and as she ended her little speech she sighed sadly. And now we will tell the reader what Robin only knew later, and that by reading in a book of county history.

It was true that twelve of the Black Friars had been hanged for refusing to take the oath of the King's supremacy : the oath which declared him to be supreme head of the Church as well as of the State. And it was true that the sentence was carried out in the village of St. Dominick's or Domnix, as it is now called. Among those who stood by was Sir Harry Brace, to whom the Friary was given : and his presence was much commented upon : some said that he spoke with harsh gibes to the sufferers, and it was certain he showed no pity for them. When it came to the turn of the youngest of the victims, a mere lad of barely nineteen, there were angry mutterings among the villagers, and Sir Harry repressed these very sternly,

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bidding them take heed lest they made themselves appear abettors of the King's enemies.

"My lad is no man's enemy," moaned the widowed mother of the comely youth, who was even then mounting the scaffold. "None has he ever hurt or harmed. He's the youngest of all these, and thine own youngest, proud and hard as ye are, shall not live longer than he has."

Twelve friars suffered that day: and Sir Harry had twelve sons, all living. The youngest, a bright and comely lad, was eighteen years old that day: and on the same day in the year following he was dead before sunset, having gone forth well and strong to a birthday merry-making. Twelve of the house of Brace had owned Blackfriars Court, including Sir Harry and Sir John's father, during whose lifetime the county history we mentioned above had been compiled, and the youngest son of each of the twelve had died before reaching the age of nineteen. This was the famous Curse of Brace.

Now Robin, though he only had two brothers, was the youngest of Sir John's three sons; and it was natural that his father should not wish him to be told, in impressionable childhood, of this fateful story. He was himself a hard-headed, rather cynical man of the world, and stoutly refused to believe that, between the widow's curse and the early death of so many of his house, there could be any connexion beyond that of coincidence. He chiefly disliked the story because he could see that his wife remembered it, and he hated to feel that it troubled her. Something had brought the subject up on the very day on which Robin first read of the story, and Sir John was in his study and Lady Brace with him.

"It's the only thing in which you are not the most sensible woman I know," he told her, half tenderly, half irritably.

"Robin is sixteen," she answered. "I wish he were six and twenty."

"At six and twenty," said Sir John, "every one is ten years nearer to his grave than he is at sixteen!"

There came a knock at the door, and Lady Brace made no reply. It was only Robin.

"May I come in?" he said, glancing from his mother's face to his father's. "You aren't talking secrets?"

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"Come in! No, we were talking nonsense."

As her husband said this, Lady Brace smiled, half sadly, and shook her head.

"I've not come to talk secrets either: but to make a confession. I have been reading something, and I had read it almost before I knew what I was about—it was not many lines. . . ."

Lady Brace knew at once what it was. And Robin saw that she knew. He smiled at her, very cheerfully, and went on.

"Long ago, when I was a little boy, I asked you to tell me about the widow's curse, and you said you did not want me to know about it yet. You asked me not to try and find out: and I never have tried. I kept my promise. Perhaps 'not yet' is passed now: it was more than six years ago. But still I had no intention of finding out to-day. I was reading the County History, and had read about a lot of other places—Kettle Hall and its ghost, Marple Place and its secret staircase, and others, too—and I was reading about Blackfriars before I knew what I was doing. And now I know about the Curse of Brace. . . . I hope you don't mind. I did not mean to be dishonourable."

Sir John and Lady Brace saw quite clearly that their boy was only troubled at having done what seemed to him rather mean—only that it was unintentional. Of the bearing of the famous curse on himself he seemed to have no consciousness.

"He is wiser than you, Magsie," said Sir John to his wife afterwards. "It doesn't occur to him that he is in danger because a cruel thing was cruelly denounced three and a half centuries ago."

Lady Brace thanked God for it.

"All the same," she declared, "I know what I would do if this place were mine."

"Something startling?"

"Not very. I would sell it and buy another."

Sir John laughed.

"That," he said, "would not help the Dominicans much."

Within a few months they had both of them actual sorrows to bear which might well drive far from their minds the imaginary trouble, as Sir John called it, on

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which Lady Brace had been too much given to dwell. Robin continued well and strong, but his eldest brother was taken alarmingly ill, and an operation was declared necessary. The operation was performed, but the young man was dead within a week of it. Less than a year later the second son, Rudolf, was killed while playing polo. So that Robin was no longer youngest son, but only son and heir.

Sir John never recovered from the double blow: he had not married young, and Lady Brace was many years younger than her husband. He was over sixty when the death of his two elder sons came upon him, and all who knew him felt that he would not long survive them. Nor did he. Before Robin was eighteen he stood in his father's place, and the old nick-name had to be given up, for he was Sir John now.

Blackfriars was shut up, and Lady Brace took a house near Offord to be near her son, who became an undergraduate of the University half a year after his father's death.

Oddly enough, she had ceased to think of her old dread lest her boy should fall a victim to the Curse of Brace; and he himself never had thought of it. But certain subjects first suggested to his mind, long years before, by old Bliss, had lain there like seed destined to spring up.

Of Henry VIII. and the Pope he knew much more now: for history particularly interested him.

"Well, Blissy," he said one day, when he was visiting his mother at Chichele House, "I could tell you more now than you could tell me about the Pope being a bachelor and King Henry being quite the contrary. I suppose you knew he was a widower five times."

"Sir John," said Blissy, demurely, "it don't do for folks to tell all they know."

She retained unimpaired the faculty of pretending to know everything.

Robin laughed, and asked her if she still thought King Henry had "passed the Church of England" in Parliament out of his pious desire "to join in the hymns and that in English."

"Of course he did. And quite right, too. I'm sure 'Lead Kindly Light,' and 'O Paradise' 'd do anybody good: widowers or no."

Robin laughed again, and Blissy reproved him.

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"It's profane, so it is, Master Rob—Sir John I *should* say—I'm for ever tellin' the maids (pretending to want evenin's out o' Sundays) it would be better if they thought more o' the hymns and less o' the *he's*."

"It was the *she's* King Henry thought most about, I fancy," said Robin.

Blissy threw up her hands, and the argument.

The youthful baronet was a cheery person, and took his share of all the innocent pleasures of life: but he had a serious purpose in it, too. And it was to study the old religion. There was plenty at Oxford to suggest it. That subject, and devotion to his widowed mother, childless now but for himself, made up the real interest of his life. To her he was so devoted that her many sorrows were soothed by his loving care and companionship. Instead of neglecting her for his friends, he brought them to her, and she grew very fond of them for his sake.

"Oh, Robin is a ripper," one of them declared to her, meaning high eulogy, "quite a ripper. Only he's a bee in his bonnet."

Lady Brace looked ready to be fierce.

"Oh, well. It's no harm. He bothers about the Catholic Church a lot—that's all," observed Sir John's friend, cheerfully. "It wouldn't do for *me*. I'm on the other side. Naturally. Being the Reverend James *in futuro*."

The Reverend James *in futuro* smiled pleasantly, and remarked, incidentally, that Bishops "cropped up" in his family as though out of natural affinity.

"I'm sure I hope you'll be a Bishop," said Lady Brace, "and invite us to the Palace."

"Certainly. I'll make a note of it."

Ten days before his nineteenth birthday Robin fell ill: and then, indeed, did his poor mother remember her old dread and the Curse of Brace. On a chill and drizzly November afternoon he had come in wet through, and was about to change when a telegram was brought to him, which decided him to go out again at once. It was from a friend who telegraphed from London in great trouble, and Robin resolved to go to him at once: within quarter of an hour he had obtained leave of absence, and was on his way to the station: ten minutes later he was in the express train. His friend had been summoned only

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the day before to his father's death-bed, and had found the house in possession of a bailiff. Robin, on arrival in London, drove straight to the house, and immediately settled the claim and saw the bailiff depart.

Down in Oxfordshire it had been a day of rain and mist: here in London it was bitterly cold, though dry, with a freezing wind. Nothing seemed to warm Robin, and even when he was in bed one shivering fit after another shook him from head to foot. His friend had begged him to stay at his house, but Robin would not add his presence to the trouble there already, and went off to an hotel.

In the morning Scrope came round to tell Robin that his father was much better, so much so that the doctor now held out hopes of his recovery.

"But you want a doctor yourself," he said remorsefully, "and it is all my fault."

"Not a bit of it. It is my own for coming off without having the sense to change. But as it was, I just caught the express. If I had lost five minutes I should not."

Scrope fetched a doctor, and the doctor declared it impossible for Sir John to leave his bed: within a few hours it was certain that Robin had a serious attack of pneumonia. By the time Lady Brace reached her son he was much worse, and the pneumonia had affected the other lung. Every care was lavished on the patient, but he seemed to grow worse, and the poor lady almost lost hope.

Meanwhile, the improvement in Scrope's father continued, so that, by the time Robin had been ill a week, the doctor declared Mr. Scrope to be on the road to full recovery.

Robin heard this with intense gratitude, and turning to his friend he said—

"Now, I want you to do something for me. I know they think I am dying: you are a Catholic, and I wish to be one. Will you bring a priest? While you are gone I will tell my mother; you need say nothing to her."

Lady Brace came in, and Scrope went away to do what his friend had asked.

"Mother," said Robin, "listen. I have something to tell you."

Lady Brace sat down by the bed, and took the hot hand he held out to her.

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"You know I am perfectly conscious and sensible. Am I not?"

"Yes, dear boy: thank God."

"Well, then. I want very much to do something, and I hope you will not mind. But, you see, I know what I am doing. I want to be a Catholic. . . ."

She was not wholly surprised, and said so.

"I thought more than once of late that you had it in your mind," she told him gently.

"Yes. Even when I was well. But I was studying it all: and there seemed plenty of time. I did not wish to do it till I fully understood. Now, there is no time to lose. Do you mind very much?"

"No, dear: if you think it right. It is the old religion, and I have many dear friends who are Catholics. God is One, and He will not divide us, whichever way you worship Him."

Robin thanked her tenderly.

"Scrope has gone for a priest . . ." he told her. "But there is something else. You are sure you believe I am fully in my senses?"

"I am sure, dear."

"Well, it is this. I am the last Brace, and Blackfriars is mine to leave as I like. . . ."

"Oh, Robin! Do not leave it to me. I could never live there, or abide to think of it. . . ."

"No. Would you think me unjust if I did this? I would like to leave it to the Black Friars . . . providing that out of the rents a good income was secured to you. Would you mind?"

Lady Brace was weeping: but it was to hear her boy talking of "leaving" what was his; to know that he was dying.

"Oh no, dear," she said, earnestly, "I told your father long ago that I would not keep it if it were mine. And what you think of doing I think right."

Soon Scrope returned, and with him a young priest, who received Robin into the Church, and gave him Extreme Unction. Presently the lad received Holy Viaticum also.

"And now," he said, cheerfully, "I must attend to worldly matters. Scrope, you must do something else; you must get a lawyer, for I have to make my will."

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The will was made, and Lady Brace and Scrope witnessed it. When the doctor came he was not much pleased to find how much his patient had been doing. Robin's temperature had gone up, and the nurses and doctor thought it was not surprising. But Robin himself was quite cheerful.

"It always does go up at night," he said.

All that night he seemed to grow worse: and for an hour or two he wandered in his talk. But at midnight he fell into a good sleep, which lasted till morning.

"It is my birthday!" he reminded his mother.

Poor Lady Brace shuddered.

"God bless you, dear!" she whispered.

"Wish me many happy returns," he said, with a whimsical smile.

And she wished it him. God heard her wish, and answered what was a lonely widow's prayer. The temperature *was* lower. And the nurse said it was the new medicine.

"Or the Extreme Unction," said Robin.

Certainly Robin was better. And the next day he was better still. Once the birthday was over, Lady Brace began to hope more courageously.

"The Curse of Brace is broken," she thought. Anyway, her son did not die. Within a fortnight he was really convalescent: a month later he was able to go home.

"To Chichele?" asked his mother.

"No, to Blackfriars. For the last time," said Robin. "You must come this once. I want to hand it over to the Dominicans. It would not be honest to go back of my word now I am well."

But there were two words to this bargain. The Dominicans consented to receive back Blackfriars, and the lands that had belonged to it at the Dissolution: the estate, however, had been increased, during three centuries and a half, by various marriages and purchases of the heads of the house of Brace, and to them the Dominicans plainly declared they could have no claim in equity, or sentiment even. The Braces had been a prudent, thrifty race, and fond of marrying heiresses: the estate was now treble what it had been in Henry VIII.'s time. The Manor of Baron's Thorpe, for instance, had never belonged

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to Blackfriars: and to it the Dominicans had no claim whatever.

Robin urged that for three centuries the rents of Domnix and other manors had been lost to the Order: for that he insisted on making some compensation at least. Finally, the extraordinary dispute was submitted to the Holy See: and the decision of Rome was that, since Sir John Brace wished to do all justice, Blackfriars Priory, with Domnix Village and Manor, should be restored to its original owners, and twenty-five thousand pounds in money.

Sir John was no longer a very rich man: but neither was he at all poor. And, though his fellow-squires in Chalkshire said he was a madman, Lady Winyates, of King's Winyates, who had three very charming daughters, said that was nonsense, and was uncommonly pleasant to the young baronet. When he came to live at Baron's Thorpe he was her next neighbour, and she asked him to luncheon on the very first Friday after he arrived there—and her cook sent up an excellent fish-luncheon. Clarina Winyates wished he would come every Friday, for she was High Church, and had generally to lunch, on that day, off rice pudding and mashed potatoes. Though she crossed herself while saying grace, Lady Winyates did not reprove her afterwards, but merely observed incidentally (when Sir John was gone) that for her part she liked real turtle better than mock.

"Of course," said her eldest daughter, Amelia, who was not at all High Church, "there are different sorts of turtles. Mamma means the cooing sort—perhaps."

All the same, Amelia made a smiling bridesmaid three months later, though the wedding took place in the restored chapel at Blackfriars (that had for many years been a billiard-room) and it was not a mixed marriage.

THE END

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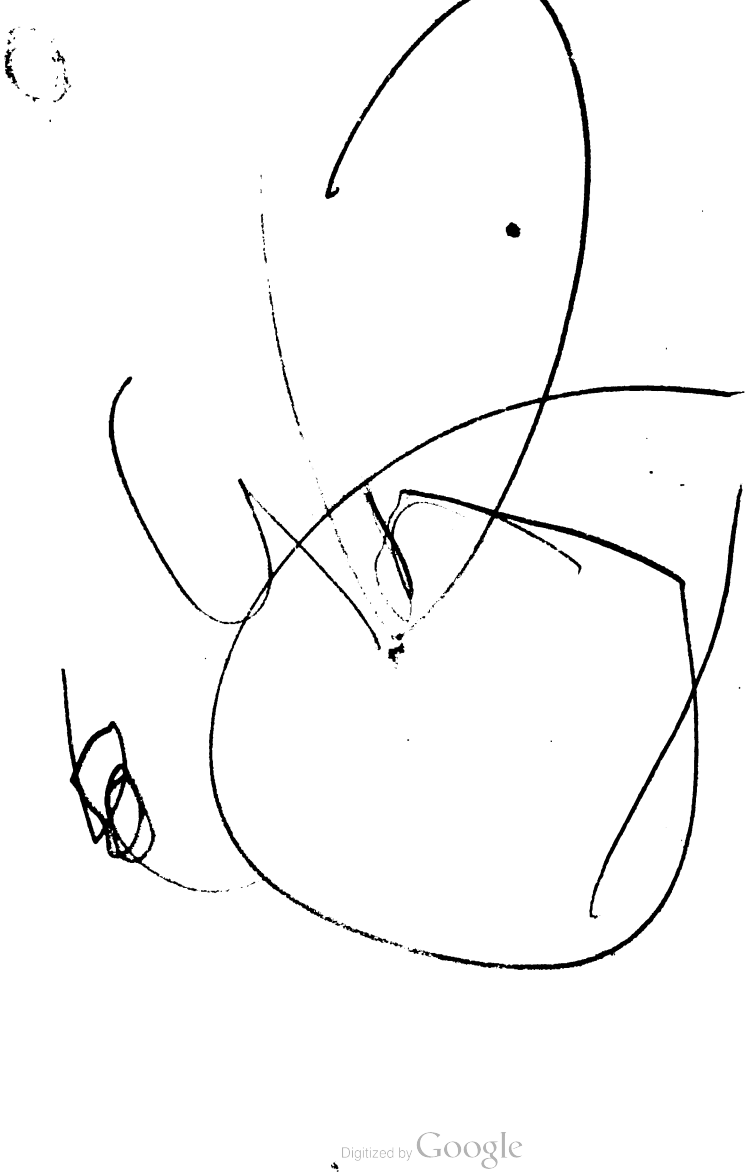

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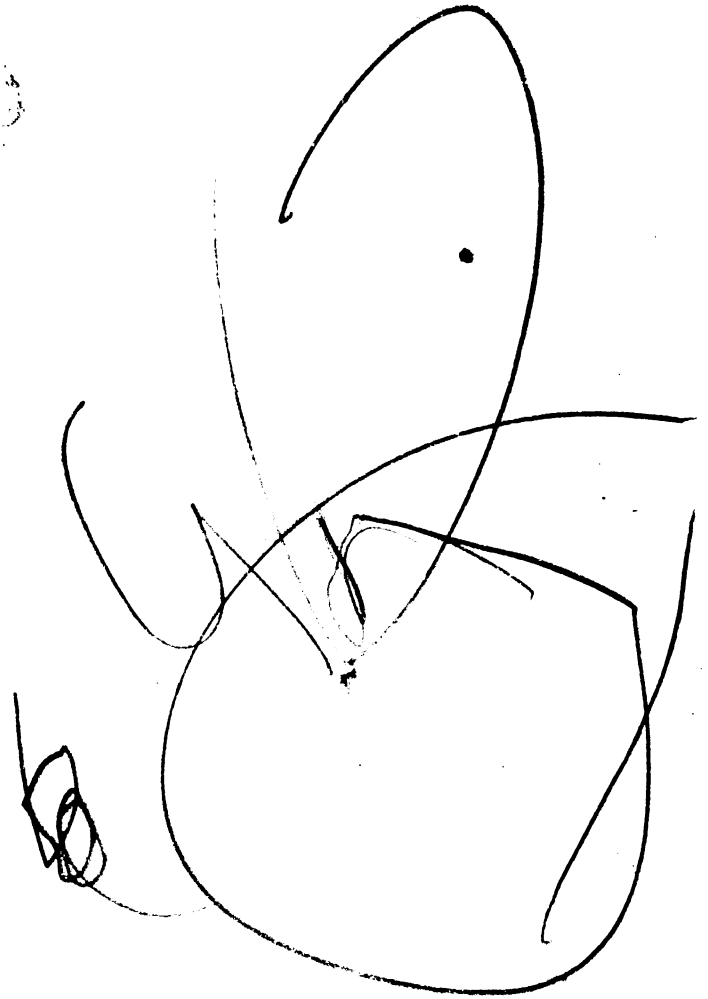

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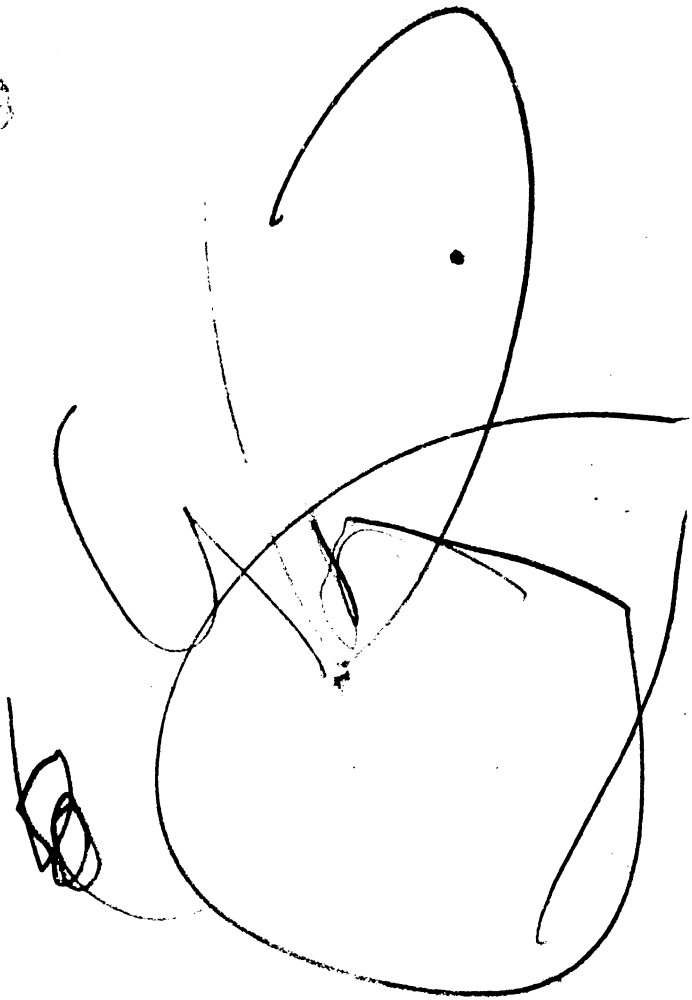

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